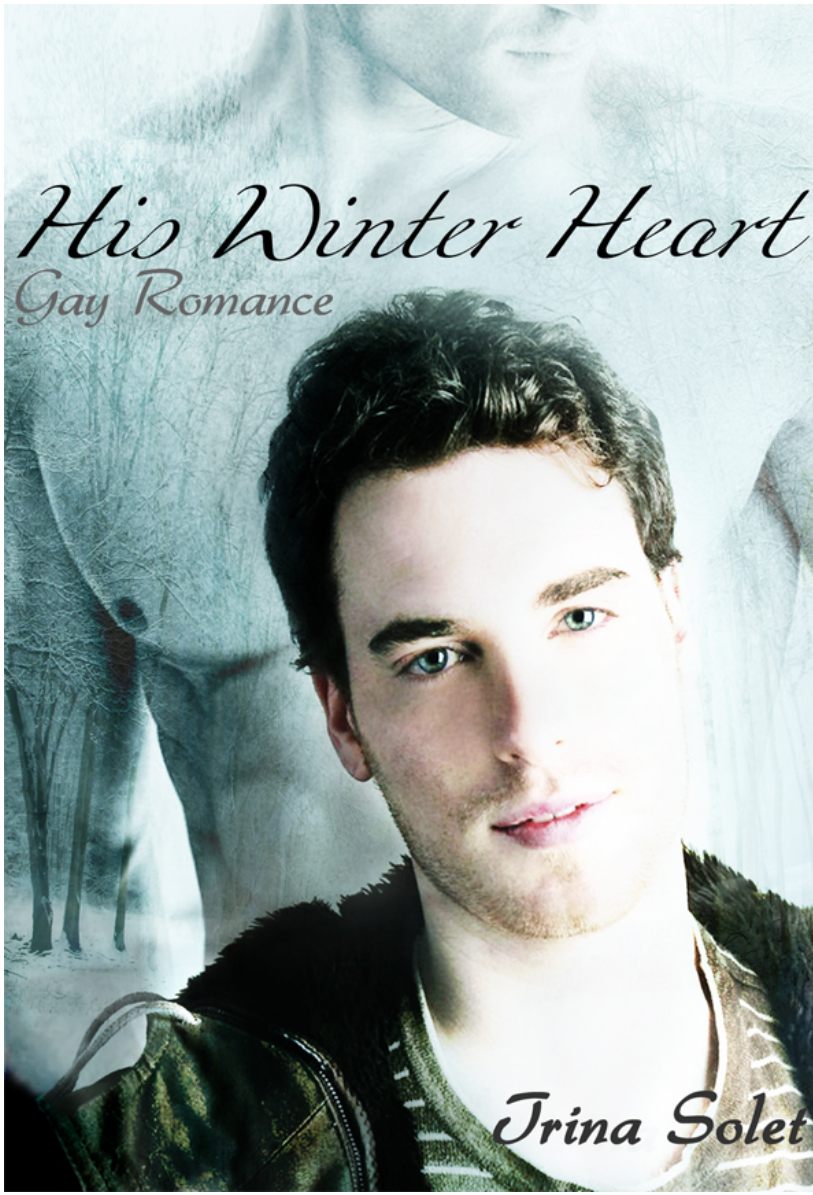
His Winter Heart
Gay Romance
Irina Solet

His Winter Heart: Gay Romance

By Trina Solet

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His Winter Heart

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Chapter 1

On the tree lined sidewalks, the leftover leaves of autumn were crunching underfoot. Deeply brown, they were being swept and blown away. They were disappearing. The bare branches looked brittle as cold winds whistled through them. Those same cruel winds had stripped them of their last leaves. Looking up through the stark treetops to the darkening sky, Colin felt like nature was sending him a message. "Get your ass inside," it said to him and every other creature without a home.

Colin heard the message loud and clear. The days were only going to get colder and the nights were already freezing. It would be snowing soon. So far he hadn't been able to find a place to stay for more than a night or two.

It was that time of the evening when it started to get seriously cold the second the sun disappeared behind the tallest of the buildings. The wind was already cutting through his jacket. People were bustling, hurrying somewhere warm, maybe home. Colin envied them because they had a place to go. For now he had somewhere to head for too. He was going to his job, but after that... This might be another night he spent chilled to the bone and wide awake, scared to stop anywhere to rest because he might get arrested or attacked.

Since he still had some time to kill, he spent it staring into store windows and silently cursing Brad. He was a blackmailing son of a bitch. It was his fault Colin was walking the streets, lightheaded from hunger, watching the displays taunt him with scarves and boots and gloves sticking out of pockets of fur lined jackets. His own jacket was OK, and his shoes were holding together, but they weren't good enough to take the place of central heating and a roof over his head. He was saving the little money he earned so he could chip in for rent or at least bills or groceries if he found someone who would let him crash at their place.

The last place where he lived was Brad's apartment. Brad was his brother's best friend. Tim, Colin's older brother, was in Canada. That's where Tim found work with one of their father's cousins. Before Tim left, he and Colin both lived with Brad. With few

marketable skills, Colin couldn't land any decent paying jobs, and Tim had the worst luck keeping a job, maybe because of his quick temper. They barely made ends meet. Most of the time, they were late with their share of the rent. That's why Tim went as far as Canada to find work.

When Tim left, Brad had promised him that he would look out for Colin and give him a place to stay. Tim and Brad had been tight through most of their childhoods and inseparable in high school. Tim didn't worry as much about Colin as long as Brad gave him a place to live. Tim trusted Brad, but he shouldn't have. Brad was a snake. If Tim knew what he tried to pull, he would kill him, tear him limb from limb then put him back together and kill him again.

For now, Colin wasn't going to tell Tim anything, not about Brad or about himself and where he was living, which was nowhere. He would just keep walking around until it was time for his shift at the diner. It was only part time. He washed dishes there and bussed tables in the evenings when the place got busy. As a bonus, he knew that he could get something to eat even if he had to sneak it off a customer's plate before he washed it. Damn, he was so hungry that the idea didn't even sound disgusting to him. As he passed a pizza place and smelled it, he got so preoccupied with food that he stopped worrying about where he would sleep tonight.

*

Wes wouldn't call Penny's Diner his favorite place to eat, but he often found himself there. It was only a block from his apartment building. Its windows allowed a clear view inside where it was warm, and the smell of hot food permeated the air. On such a dismal night, Wes didn't have the heart to pass up the place in search of something better or at least different. He looked in and became drawn into one of its red booths with white tables.

Wes usually took a booth in the middle, but those were occupied tonight. He took one closer to the kitchen. It was serendipity. He heard a very pleasant, male voice calling to the waitress who had just served Wes his stew. The voice was just deep enough to resonate inside Wes and stir his imagination. The voice said, "You

don't have any room at your place, do you? I can sleep on the floor. I just want to be inside. I'm so tired. I've been walking around all day."

"That's right, you got kicked out. Sorry, honey. John would go apeshit. No way. I can't take the drama. See if Lee can put you up."

"No. I asked. He has a girlfriend and her kid living with him now."

"Oh. Sorry. Good luck finding some place to crash."

As the waitress walked away, Wes turned to see who was so desperate for a place to stay. His eyes fell on a beautiful young man. Broad shouldered, he was strong but with muscles that were streamlined rather than bulging. He had curly, brown hair and blue eyes that looked worriedly out the diner windows as he wiped a table. It was already dark out and not much could be seen outside. But he probably didn't need to see what was out there to know that it was cold and inhospitable. It wasn't where he wanted to be tonight.

Wes's curiosity was now overtaken by other emotions. There was probably some compassion mixed in there, but mainly he felt desire. His eyes lingered on the young man's partly open mouth. Of course he stared too long, and the young guy caught him at it. His eyes widened and he looked away even faster than Wes did. That told Wes all he needed to know.

Wes called him over to his table. Seeing his expression, Wes was sure of it now. This guy gave Wes a look which he recognized as checking out another man out of sexual interest. It was perfunctory, without any real intent. Other things preoccupied the young man's mind.

"Could you wipe this up? I don't want to get my sleeve wet," Wes said pointing to a ring of condensation on the table. The guy had to reach over him to get to it as Wes hoped.

"Three hundred to come home with me and spend the night," Wes said quietly while the guy leaned over him.

Startled by his words, the young man flinched away. He looked bewildered, desperate and a little sad. But then he stared long and hard at Wes. His look changed. His breathing became deep and even. He looked Wes in the eye and said, "OK."

*

Colin had noticed him as soon as he walked in. Tall, blond and built – how could he miss him. Preoccupied with spending yet another night roaming the streets, he couldn't give the blond guy the attention he deserved. He must have sent him some kind of signal anyway otherwise the guy wouldn't have propositioned him.

Colin couldn't believe he was standing there, looking at this man and thinking about going home with him for money. And it wasn't just the money. Going home with this guy meant he wouldn't have to spend the night out there in the cold.

While Colin was thinking it over, the man waited patiently. If he was only less attractive, or more leering, less patient and quiet, it would give Colin a reason to refuse. But the guy was all that plus big, blond, broad shouldered, with gray eyes that pulled Colin in. Just the thought of climbing into this guy's lap made him hard. How bad could it be to spend a night with him? Colin decided to find out.

Colin didn't want to leave before his shift was done. That wasn't a deal-breaker for this guy.

"I'll wait for you," he said in that deep, quiet voice.

Colin's heart was already beating fast. Hearing his words, Colin swallowed and his heart beat even faster. This was actually going to happen. As the guy got up to leave, he told Colin he would be back when his shift was over.

"I'll be outside. My place isn't far," he said as he put on his jacket.

Colin only managed to nod. For once in his life, his mouth wasn't running a mile a minute. Stunned, excited, and a little confused, he stared after the guy as he left. After what happened with Brad, Colin couldn't believe he just said yes to fucking for money.

Even before Tim left, Colin had noticed Brad eyeing him in a funny way. At first Colin thought that Brad might be gay. He had seen him with plenty of skanky girls, but what else would explain that look? He figured Brad wanted something from him, maybe a blow job or a fuck. As long as Tim was around, Brad wouldn't dare touch his younger brother. Once Tim was gone, the leash came off. Brad made demands that started out as just wheedling but turned into outright threats. But Colin had been wrong. Brad didn't want him. He wanted to make money off him. Colin had just lost his job at

the fast food place. That's when Brad started coming up with moneymaking ideas.

"Don't you want to help with the rent?" Brad asked.

Colin had been paying a little bit, but not since he was out of work.

At first Brad only suggested that Colin should maybe do some stuff over webcam, just chat with guys. Some trashy girl he knew was doing that and making good money. She told him a lot of guys did it too. That's what gave Brad the idea to recruit Colin.

"You need to make money," Brad said. "You wouldn't have to do anything, and no one would know. It's easy money. I would just take a small cut. Just for using my computer and helping you set things up."

Colin refused and looked for any other kind of work, but Brad just kept pushing. He was telling him how much money he could make. Then he started handing him phone numbers.

"Text this guy. Just see if you hit it off." It was clear that Brad wanted to be his pimp.

When his suggestions had no results, he moved on to telling Colin he would throw him out. Then he threatened to call Tim and tell him Colin had been doing what Brad was trying to force him to do. Colin stood firm, not out of pride, but out of anger. Colin was nothing to him, but Tim was supposed to be Brad's best friend. Knowing how much this would hurt Tim, Colin wanted to punch Brad. It really pissed him off that Brad would betray him like that.

And Colin couldn't even tell Tim. He would just get mad and worried and leave his job to come take care of Colin again and probably beat up on Brad. He kept his mouth shut even when Brad kicked him out. He didn't tell Tim about Brad or about not having a place to live. Colin was eighteen now, and he was going to take care of himself, show Tim he didn't have to worry about him.

Going off with some guy for money probably wasn't the best way to prove that. He didn't even want to consider what Tim would think of him if he knew.

With that on his mind, Colin spent the rest of his shift in a daze. Several times he considered ducking out through the back. But at the end of the day, Colin walked out through the front door, knowing that the big, blond guy was waiting out there to pick him up and

walk him to his place. Stepping out into the cold, night air, Colin saw that the guy was waiting on the sidewalk in front of the diner the same way he had waited for Colin's answer, no fidgeting, no impatience. The guy was impassive but not cold. A smile almost brightened his eyes when he saw Colin coming toward him.

As they walked to his apartment building, the guy said his name was Wes. Colin took too long trying to figure out if he should give his own name or a fake one. He ended up not giving either as he was distracted by a lady texting while trying to walk three unruly dogs. This happened right in front of what turned out to be Wes's apartment building. It was a nice, solid brick building with twelve floors. Wes was on the ninth.

In the elevator, Colin took another look at Wes so he could figure out why he had said yes to him. Wes looked good in a pale, washed out kind of way. He had a big, hard body under his clothes, but they were too bulky to see much. Colin would have to peel off at least two or three layers to get a good feel. He had the impression that it was the kind of body he would like to get his hands on and explore for hours. Depending on what Wes had in mind, he might even get to do just that.

Colin kind of looked forward to it. He was nervous too, but with each passing second spent thinking about Wes naked, he got less nervous and more eager to fully earn those three hundred bucks. For three hundred, he figured this guy was sure to want a thorough workout. Colin was rock hard in anticipation, but his hands were shaking and not from the cold. If anything he felt a little warm. Almost dizzy with the mixture of conflicting feelings, he gulped and tried to breathe evenly. After all, he was about to become a professional. He should act like it and definitely not hyperventilate or pass out.

Colin stepped out of the elevator on wobbly legs and followed Wes to his door. Going in, he saw that his place seemed really impersonal. If it wasn't for a pair of boots by the door, he wouldn't even think anyone lived there. The furniture was mostly black and clutter free. There was a black leather sofa and a recliner facing a big TV with all the good stuff plugged into it but not any game consoles. Though the leather furniture looked comfortable, the place was stark

and too neat to have been lived in. The kitchen was pristine as was the dark wood floor.

"Did you just move in?" Colin asked since that would explain it.

"I've lived her for a couple of years," Wes told him as he took off his jacket.

"I guess you don't have a lot of stuff," Colin said.

He took off his jacket too. Wes took it from him and hung it on a hook next to his own.

"What would you expect to see?" Wes asked. He looked around his apartment like he didn't know what was missing.

"I don't know. Dishes, cups, newspapers, unpaid bills," Colin listed. That was just the tip of the iceberg. In his experience, the list went on and on.

"I like to put things away."

"You might want to leave a few things out so people know you're not a vampire. You are kind of pale, you know."

"And the compliments just keep coming," Wes said with a sigh, but he didn't seem too put out.

*

As he hung up their jackets by the door, Wes realized that his guest had not introduced himself yet. He waited until he was done questioning him about his apartment before he asked, "What's your name?"

"It's Colin. Unless you want a fake one. Then it's Max." He looked proud of that choice.

"Colin will be fine."

"I'm not sure what you had in mind, but we will be using condoms for the heavy stuff, right? Wait. Not in the form of a question. We will be using condoms. No question mark."

Before he answered, Wes waited to make sure he was done rambling.

"Of course," Wes said, but he now took a long, hard look at Colin. The facial hair had made him look older. Examining him more closely, Wes could see that he was very young. He was almost angelic in a scruffy kind of way. Wes wasn't sure he could go

through with this.

"I imagine you've been offered money before," Wes said to try to persuade himself that what he was doing was OK.

"Umm. Kind of," Colin said uncertainly.

Wes was not persuaded by that answer. "But you said no?" That was a given. Everything about Colin was all wrong for someone who had been paid for sex before.

"Oh, big time. And it cost me. But I'm OK with it now, I guess. That's why we're here. Do we jump right to it, or is there chitchat first? Is this the chitchat? Is that what we're doing now?"

As he rambled, Colin looked so confused and ignorant of what was going to happen that Wes couldn't help asking him, "Have you even had sex before?"

"Depends on what you mean."

"Oh, God. How old are you?" Wes asked even though he really didn't want to know.

"I'm almost nineteen. And I'm not a virgin," he said looking offended at the accusation. "I just didn't know what kind of sex you meant. I never took it up the ass. I've done other stuff, but I only fucked two guys. One of them was OK. The other one was really hot. They both seemed to like it."

Wes felt disappointment wash over him. However much he wanted him, he couldn't have him. The years between them were almost Colin's whole life. Colin was just too young and inexperienced, not to mention desperate. And apparently the experience of thirty-four years hadn't taught Wes anything. How could he have been so blind? Colin's character was written on his face. He was completely transparent. Wes had deliberately blinded himself to all that because he wanted him more than anyone in a long time. And for three hundred bucks he thought he could have him.

Seeing how Wes reacted to his meager sexual history, Colin became a little defensive.

"Were you looking for a guy with lots of experience and you picked me? What do I look like?" Colin asked. "Do I look like a guy who fucks for money? Is that it? Because this other guy, Brad, he wanted me to do that. He said I was perfect for it. Is there something about me...?"

"No, no. Definitely not. You are just someone men want, and some aren't picky about how they get you. That's all. There's nothing about you that says you do it for money. Some men are just willing to take advantage of your desperation to get what they want. Men like me. Losers."

"Hey! You're not so bad."

"Let's call this off. I'll give you fifty bucks for your trouble. You can sleep here tonight. I'll buy you breakfast in the morning, and we'll go our separate ways. I hope you're not disappointed."

"I don't know. I'm not dying to be a prostitute."

"So the man you mentioned who wanted you to..."

"He said if I didn't, he'd kick me out," Colin told him.

"Then why did you agree to my offer?"

"You looked pretty good. I'd get to sleep indoors, and I need the money."

"How is that any different than what that man wanted from you?"

"I guess because it's someone like you and not some gross guy," Colin said with a shrug.

"You said I was a vampire."

"Sure, but you have that whole big, blond thing going for you. Your eyes are sort of... I don't know. There's something about your eyes. Whatever." He blushed. "Are you fishing for compliments? You're a good-looking guy. 'Nuff said." Then he thought of something. "Hey, how come you're paying for it? I mean. The way you look, you could just go out and get a guy."

"Even you?"

"Umm. Probably," Colin said and smirked.

"I guess I wanted to pretend I was being a good Samaritan while at the same time getting what I want."

"But you don't want me any more?"

"I do. But I don't want to corrupt you."

"Better you than someone else. If things don't turn around for me..." He looked really down just then.

"You have a place to stay for tonight. You have time to figure out tomorrow night. For now you can watch TV if you like. I'll be in my office, working," Wes told him.

As he left for his office, he saw Colin sit down and grab the remote

off the coffee table. Wes had to take a few deep breaths once he was alone. He didn't know if he regretted what he almost did or that he didn't do it. When he took his libido out of the equation, he wasn't left with any doubts. Having seen enough relief on Colin's face, he knew he made the right decision. If he focused on that, he might even be able to concentrate on getting some work done. Before he could get to work, Wes remembered that he didn't offer Colin any food or drink. Wes went back to the living room to tell him to help himself to whatever he wanted from his understocked kitchen.

When Wes went in, he found Colin asleep. The TV was still off. The remote was loosely cradled in Colin's hand. Slumped over the arm rest, it was as if he had fallen asleep within seconds of sitting down. Wes first brought over a pillow and a blanket then he woke him up so he could lie down properly and maybe take off his shoes.

"Not yet," Colin pleaded, not willing to be woken up. With his shoes still on, he curled himself around the pillow, and Wes covered him up. The couch wasn't really big enough for him to fit on it comfortably, but that obviously didn't matter to a guy as tired as he was.

Wes worked late into the night, unable to go to sleep. Colin's soft snoring reminded him that he was right there within reach and off limits. While doing as much useful work as he could, Wes tried to keep himself from thinking about what he wanted to do to Colin. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't escape the knowledge that it would be wonderful to sink into his young flesh. Wes could see him writhe and buck under him. He could hear him moan and call his name. He could feel Colin strain upward, reaching for him, pulling him down for a thorough, wet kiss that would be stamped on Wes's memory forever.

Well past midnight last night, Wes had forced himself to go to bed even if all he did was lie there restless under the influence of visions of Colin. The next morning it was impossible to stay in bed. All night he had used his bed to turn and turn, and when his visions got the better of him, to find some relief in the tight circle of his fingers.

Though he kept his own hours and answered to no one, Wes

always got up early. He expected to find Colin still asleep on his couch. Somehow that didn't prepare him for the reality of it. On coming into the living room, Wes stopped. The sight of Colin sleeping was startlingly beautiful. Wes felt like there should be a guard on duty to keep Colin safe from men like Wes.

To keep himself in check, Wes maintained a minimum safe distance as he went into the kitchen. He didn't even try to avert his eyes. That would have been impossible. As he stared, Wes felt like he was taking in what he saw, storing it away deep inside. One of Colin's legs was most of the way off the couch. His foot, clad only in a sock, dangled right above the floor. He must have taken off his shoes sometime during the night. His hands were stuck deep under the pillow and half his face was buried in it. His hair was slightly damp and plastered to his face. His mouth was hanging open reminding Wes of how he had snored lightly, just a low rumbling sound that Wes wouldn't mind having right next to his ear.

Wes turned away and started coffee. He got out the bread for toast then remembered he had promised to take Colin to breakfast so he put it away. Once the coffee started brewing, Colin blinked and groaned. It was clear how much he didn't want to wake up despite the inviting smell of fresh brewed coffee filling the air.

"Keep sleeping. It's not time for breakfast yet," Wes told him. It actually was time for breakfast, but Colin still looked so sleepy Wes decided to delay breakfast and do some work.

*

Once Colin found himself inside Wes's apartment, where it was warm and safe, he started to feel kind of heavy. He got knocked right out and all it took was sitting in a warm apartment on a comfortable couch. He found himself waking up in the pale gray light of early morning. A pillow was under his head and a blanket over him. Soft black leather was under his hand. Wes's deep, soothing voice had told him to keep sleeping. It sounded good to him, and he went back under.

The next time he woke up, Colin could tell it was much later. Streaming in through the big windows, the light was bright and

crisp. In the daylight, the place looked only a little better. It was still bare and not lived in. Colin got the same impression as last night. This place and everything in it was still waiting for someone to move in and start living there.

From waking up before, Colin knew that Wes made coffee, but there was no sign that anyone used the kitchen at all. When Colin used the bathroom, he found it was impeccable. What kind of guy has a clean bathroom? That was unheard of. Wes was living here like a ghost. Colin took a quick whore's bath though he hadn't earned the name yet. He was tempted by that nice, clean shower, but to use it seemed like overstepping. From a total stranger, this was already a whole lot of hospitality. Remembering that he owed Wes at least a thank you, Colin went in search of him.

Seeing an open door, he poked his head in. On the first try Colin had found Wes's lair – his office. Sitting in front of three monitors in the corner of a built-in, black desk, Wes was busy at his computer. The desk ended in two tall shelves stuffed with binders, books, and computer equipment. There was a big, black filing cabinet and some boxes stacked next to it. Most importantly, this place was in full use.

"Now this is what I'm talking about," Colin said as he gestured around.

Startled, Wes turned to him and smiled vaguely at his outburst. "My office?"

"Yes, it is," Colin said. "And it looks normal. Like a human office."

"I guess it's time for breakfast," Wes said, getting up.

"It's almost ten," Colin pointed out. "Thanks for letting me sleep. I needed it."

"It was no trouble," Wes said as he got his shoes and jacket on.

Colin had his on already. He knew he was about to get thrown out. It was nice of Wes to follow through and take him to breakfast. Colin knew he hadn't earned it. He kind of wished he could do a little something to show his appreciation, but Wes seemed withdrawn, kind but all business. Wes was sending him a clear signal. It said "No longer interested."

Chapter 2

Next evening, Wes returned to Penny's Diner even though he liked to eat at a different place most nights to add variety to his life of routine. This time he had only one reason to go back so soon. And there he was. His reason for coming was stacking dirty plates onto a tray. Wes smiled. That was all the encouragement Colin needed to stop what he was doing and come over to his table.

"Do you have a place to sleep tonight?" Wes asked him.

"Are you going to make me another offer?" Colin asked with a self-satisfied grin.

"You can sleep over if you have nowhere else. That's my offer."

"This girl I know is talking to her roommate about letting me stay with them if I pay a little rent. I'm supposed to hear from her," Colin said and crossed the fingers of both hands.

"Good luck," Wes told him. He knew it was a better solution for him than another night at Wes's. It would be unconscionable to wish for Colin's friend to fail him.

Even if he didn't allow himself to make that wish, Wes still took his time with his BLT. Without fully acknowledging what he was doing, Wes watched Colin as he went in and out of the kitchen, doing his job, flashing a smile at the customers he knew. There was something almost clumsy about his movements. The way he picked up a glass or a plate wasn't quite fumbling, but it wasn't deft either. His fingers were long but not dexterous. He nearly collided with the waitresses twice. Wes admired how his body twisted so he could get out of their way. It was too easy to picture that body in bed, eager for his cock.

Wes looked down at his empty plate and ordered a lemon meringue pie so he would have an excuse to linger. The pie was still slightly frozen when it arrived, but Wes didn't mind. He didn't usually order dessert. Eating it reminded him of eating out with his grandparents in establishments that served dinner early, where he was often the only child. He remembered always being greeted by the waiters and waitresses in a special way. When the waitresses would ask about dessert, they would look from his grandparents to Wes. Then Wes

would eat a piece of cake or pie while his grandparents only sipped coffee. Wes felt like he was recreating those moments with every mouthful of translucent lemon cream and foamy egg whites.

As the past threatened to pull him down, he looked up to break the spell. He sought out the sight of Colin as an antidote to the stuffy confinement of memories. Taking in Colin's broad shoulders, his swimmer's body, the curve of his mouth, his luminous eyes, Wes felt that everything oppressive was banished. Wes's own untasted youth was returned to him whenever those insinuating eyes were turned in his direction, and Colin winked at him.

Whenever Colin passed his table, he smiled at Wes, but not the last time. Wes obsessed over the reason Colin had looked more serious. Then he got his answer. Colin came by his table with the downcast look of a guy about to ask for a favor.

"No luck with Naomi's roommate. Is your offer still good?" Colin asked in a slightly gloomy voice. His eyes were hopeful though.

"Sure. Do you want me to wait for you?"

"No. I picked up two extra hours covering for someone. Can I meet you at your place?"

"OK." Wes felt his heart beating faster. How was it possible that he was more excited at the prospect of Colin coming over tonight than last time. Tonight there was no possibility that anything would happen. Wes had made an absolute decision about that. Colin was just going to sleep over like he did before, but Wes's heart had some ideas of its own. Despite Wes's decisions, it harbored its own unreasonable hopes and longings.

*

Colin had gotten his hopes up that Naomi would come through for him with an actual place to live. Now he stood in the lobby of Wes's apartment building, out of the cold which had been cutting right through his clothes. It was a winter night no doubt about it. Colin thought about that apartment upstairs. It was somehow snug and welcoming though at first it seemed sterile.

Colin passed up the elevator and made his way up the stairs, taking the steps two at a time. Everywhere he and Tim had lived since their

parents died had been a dump – when they lived in that little hole of a place with noise and smells coming through the walls, with Uncle Hal, with that girl who latched onto Tim, and then with Brad. In those kinds of places, the elevators were either disgusting or gave someone the opportunity to corner and attack you. The second reason was why Tim told him never to use them. In Wes's building, the elevator was neither dirty nor dangerous, but Colin still took the stairs now that he was going up alone. It was only the ninth floor anyway.

Though he was disappointed that it didn't work out with Naomi and her roommate, Colin wasn't exactly sorry to find himself back at Wes's apartment. For one thing, it gave him kind of a thrill to be there. Wes was pretty clear that nothing was going to happen, but the sense of anticipation didn't leave Colin. It was heightened to a screaming pitch when Wes opened the door for him. Averting his eyes, Wes stepped aside to let him in. It was like Colin had embarrassed him with his sexual expectations and stray thoughts about the probable size of his dick.

As soon as he walked in and took off his jacket, Colin went over to the big living room windows. He had missed out on the view the last time. He had been too distracted and nervous. Tonight Colin saw other tall apartment buildings blocking his view. Between their dark silhouettes and lit up windows, he could see the black, starless sky. With half an ear, he listened as Wes told him to make himself at home. Colin was thinking about what it would be like to fuck in front of a big window like that. Could people see in? Turning to Wes to ask him if he had ever done it there, he found that Wes had already retreated to his office, just like the night before.

At least this time Colin didn't pass out the second his ass hit the couch. He watched TV while Wes worked in his office. Around 1:00AM, Colin was ready to go to sleep. Not sure if Wes wanted him to sleep on the couch or what, Colin went to bother him in his office. Seeing him busy with his impressive equipment and all three monitors displaying something incomprehensible, Colin wondered how much time he spent working. Did this guy even know how to have fun other than propositioning homeless busboys. Before asking about the sleeping arrangements, he asked Wes about his work.

"I own a small company. We design software," Wes told him.

"Like apps?" Colin asked a little excited that Wes might be into something cool like that.

"Sort of."

"Games?" he asked even more excited about that possibility however unlikely it might be.

"Not even close. It's specialized software. Mostly we modify our existing software templates to client specifications."

"Exciting!" Colin mocked him. "So what are you working on now?"

"I'm cleaning up code. Checking for errors."

"Ooh!" Colin gasped.

"It's for a small fishery operation's temperature and salinity controls."

"Aah!" Colin gasped again.

"I know it's boring. That's why I don't usually invite people to watch me do it," Wes said defensively.

"Well, I came in here to ask where I'll be sleeping."

Wes got up and led him down the hall. They passed a bedroom with a big bed. It was decorated in the same black and more black design of the living room. Next to it was a smaller room. Colin poked his head in and saw that it was a weight room.

"Ah, the torture chamber," he said and wondered why they were there.

"Correct," Wes confirmed. "Also the guest room."

"Where?" Colin asked just as he spotted a futon hiding behind the exercise equipment. It was black, of course.

"It's the only spare room I have," Wes told him. "The futon is for sleeping."

"That thing?" Colin said. It looked about as comfortable as the exercise bench.

"You're picky all of a sudden?" Wes said and rightly too.

"In a place like this, I was expecting a real bed."

"I don't have many guests," Wes said.

"You might want to lie about that."

"So I seem less like some weird loner?"

"Your words not mine. Your very accurate words," Colin said.

"I'll get you some sheets."

"And a pillow because I don't see one," Colin told him as he tested the futon and found it just as uncomfortable as it looked.

"I'll have to lend you one of mine again."

"You really don't have anyone staying over, do you?" Colin asked in astonishment. Could he really be that much of a loner?

"I might change my mind about letting you have that pillow," Wes warned him.

"I'll just climb in bed with you then," Colin said to Wes.

"That's what we're trying to avoid," Wes grumbled and gave Colin a warning look over his shoulder as he left to try and make the futon marginally fit for sleeping.

But to Colin it had never seemed like such a bad prospect. He wondered if Wes would do it with him if money wasn't involved. Or more like, Colin hoped he would. If Wes was a little weird, so what? And Colin wasn't really judging him. He just couldn't seem to keep his opinions to himself. Usually he could keep his mouth zipped when he needed to, like at work. But with Wes he felt like it would be wrong to be on his best behavior, like it would be dishonest or something. He would bet Wes didn't feel the same way. He probably wanted him to zip it.

Once he was in bed, Colin listened to the sounds of Wes going to bed in the next room. He could hear water running, doors opening and closing, the floor creaking. The sounds were faint, but they had Colin's full attention. He still listened even as the apartment grew silent. Now Colin became more aware of what was closest to him. So this was Wes's own pillow Colin was sleeping on. He smiled and sniffed it. The smell went right to his cock.

Colin stretched his back trying to get comfortable, but he knew the futon wasn't to blame. Was it wrong that all of a sudden Colin wished Wes wasn't such a good guy? Right now he could be enjoying Wes taking full advantage of him instead of lying on an uncomfortable futon, hard and unsatisfied. He wished he was as tired as last night. Colin had been disappointed that Wes didn't want to get him in the sack then too, but relieved as well. He had been horny and desperate enough not to care about what it would mean, but he really

didn't want to fuck for money.

That was exactly the kind of thing Brad wanted him to do, and he had made himself homeless before he would even consider it. Brad couldn't persuade him or threaten him into it. Wes didn't have to do much to put him on that path. Good thing he changed his mind because Colin was ready to go for it.

Even now, if Wes wanted to fuck him for letting him sleep over, Colin would agree. If he came into the weight room to collect rent, Colin would bend right over for him, or kneel down, or do whatever. Was that just simple attraction with a big dose of gratitude thrown in? Or was it that Wes was so hands off that Colin felt slighted or challenged to make Wes want him again.

He remembered that look Wes gave him after he offered him money. The look that said, "I want you whatever it takes." Even that kind of impersonal desire was nice. It made Colin's dick stir. But from Wes it seemed stronger, more focused. Colin was sure that not just any guy could get Wes's attention like that. He wanted Wes to look at him like that again, with eyes that promised to have him coming and coming and just begging for more.

Chapter 3

Opening his eyes to a mean set of weights confused Colin until he remembered where he was sleeping. He listened for Wes, but didn't hear anything. He didn't fool himself into thinking he wasn't up yet. For Colin, getting up at seven was pretty early, but Wes was probably up and working already.

Colin confirmed this after he took a shower, got dressed and went to lean on the doorway of his office.

"I took a shower. I hope that's OK," Colin said.

"Of course," Wes told him as he got up from his desk.

"I probably used up all the hot water."

"It's still OK," Wes told him. "Are you ready for breakfast?"

"You're feeding me again?" Colin asked.

"I did make breakfast part of the deal," Wes told him.

Actually Wes had only made it part of the deal the first night, but Colin wasn't going to argue.

"We can go to a place a few blocks east. They have a very good homemade sausage and waffle plate," Wes said.

"You don't have to take me out for breakfast. I can make us something," Colin offered and went into the kitchen to see what was in the fridge. "But I would need ingredients," Colin said, seeing the empty fridge.

He was relieved that he didn't need to put his money where his mouth was. He didn't exactly know how to cook, but he figured he could fake his way through frying an egg or two. He had seen it done plenty of times, most recently at Penny's Diner where the cooks could crack two eggs at once, one in each hand. He wasn't going to try for that fancy move. With no eggs, he wasn't going to be doing anything at all. He looked at Wes for an explanation for his empty fridge and mostly bare cupboards, which he also opened. The only edible things he found were a few snacks and a bag of whole wheat bread.

"I like to eat out so I don't get stuck in here alone all day," Wes told him.

"And because you don't have anything edible in your whole

kitchen."

"It's the other way around. If I stocked the kitchen with food, I wouldn't need to go out to eat." Wes looked off to the side as he continued his weird explanation. "When I first started living alone after college, I found myself almost trapped in a routine with no human contact. I worked from home so I hardly ever left my apartment. I even ordered groceries to be delivered. I decided that it wasn't healthy to spend that much time alone."

"So you decided to starve yourself out. Why not use teargas?" Colin asked. "You know I'm getting kind of tired of telling you how weird you are."

"You can stop any time," Wes told him with a wry smile. "Let's go to breakfast."

*

Last night, staying away from Colin was both more difficult and easier than Wes expected. He had seen Colin's relative innocence stamped on his face. He had also seen how much he needed to find a permanent place to live. Wes just had to imagine him out on the cold, dark streets all alone to want to give him a safe, warm place at least for one more night. And that didn't include taking advantage of him.

Soon after he met him, Colin's wellbeing had become more important to him than his desire for him. The feeling resembled compassion but went deeper. It reached deep enough inside him to scare him. Wes couldn't afford to develop feelings for Colin. It would be bad for both of them.

That morning, Wes made a point of sticking to their agreement and taking him to breakfast. In reality, he just wanted to stay in his company a little longer. He felt as if his world would turn from vivid to gray the second Colin stepped out the door.

As he took him to eat waffles and sausage, Wes feasted on his enjoyment of every bite. Despite a mouth full of food, Colin didn't let up about Wes's vampiric, lonely existence. Wes found it odd that he didn't mind that Colin needled him about how he lived. He was actually relieved that gratitude didn't sew his mouth shut. Since

Colin felt free to speak his mind, Wes decided to steer the conversation away from himself and to another topic. He wanted to find out more about Colin. The first question was the obvious one.

"How did you end up with no place to stay?" Wes asked him as they ate, and Colin tried to load as much syrup as he could on each bite of his waffle.

"I told you how that guy wanted to pimp me out."

Wes nodded. "What about your family?"

"It's just me and my brother, Tim, but he's in Canada. He doesn't know I'm homeless."

"And why not?"

"He would leave his job and rush down here. And I'm almost nineteen. I should be able to take care of myself."

"What happened to your parents?"

"Gone. Our dad died first. His car skidded on ice. He went right off the bridge and into the river. It took them days to find him." Colin stopped speaking. He looked far away. After a moment, his eyes clouded with pain. He turned to Wes and continued. "Three years later, it was our mom. She got a lung infection. Some kind of antibiotic resistant strain. Tim blamed himself for not making her go to the hospital sooner, but it seemed like just a bad flu at first. Tim was studying to be a paramedic at the time so he thinks he should have known better. I think that's why he was so determined to do things for me. I'm only two years younger than him, but as far as he's concerned, it might as well be a thousand. Tim could have stayed in school while working to support himself if he let me quit school and go to work too. But he wanted to support both of us. He quit school and worked two jobs while making me finish two years of high school. I would have defied him, but I could tell how much it mattered to him. He was doing it for me, and for our parents, and out of guilt too. I couldn't fight all that."

"It seems that you and your brother are a lot alike," Wes said. "You both put each other before yourselves."

"I'm not doing anything other than keeping my trap shut. That's not exactly backbreaking work," Colin claimed.

"If you say so," Wes said. He didn't hide that he disagreed.

Now he almost wished he didn't know this about Colin. Though he

had asked him about himself, knowing that he was so determined not to be a burden to his older brother and that he had lost his parents didn't help Wes keep a cool head about him. As he shoveled food into his mouth, Colin looked so bright and perfect to him. He wanted to grab hold of him and tell him he would never let him go.

The next evening, Wes laced up his shoes and got his jacket, ready to go out and eat. He couldn't even pretend to himself that he was going anywhere else but the diner. As he walked down the sidewalk, he knew he wasn't going there just to eat, and he wasn't going there because it was convenient. He was going there to see Colin. It was inevitable.

The evening was chilled by a wind that drove the thin, smoky clouds against the dark blue of the sky. Going into Penny's Diner, Wes searched the place for Colin. He held his breath until he saw him then let it out with relief.

On first seeing him, Colin greeted him with a surprised look and a smile. There was also a question in his eyes about whether Wes would invite him home with him again. The thought of disappointing him made Wes's insides seize with a sick feeling. He couldn't stand the thought that Colin would have nowhere to go, that he might walk the streets all night or sleep under a park bench or in a doorway.

Colin was busy cleaning up a table so Wes took a seat. Now that Wes saw him, there was no doubt that he would invite him home with him again. He felt the words "come home with me" just waiting to burst out of him as soon as Colin was there to hear them.

*

Tonight Wes was walking with him to his apartment. It reminded Colin of that first night and what he expected to happen then. Tonight was only an echo of that. Colin was going home with a guy, but that guy had sworn off touching him. Colin still felt excitement stir low in his belly. There was a tremor in his muscles as if they still expected a workout. Deep inside, his body was getting ready to feel something. His bones steeled themselves in case they had to hold up

another man's weight when he came at him, heavy and strong.

With such an immediate awareness of Wes in every fiber of his being, Colin turned to him. They stood side by side in the elevator. Wes was physically imposing but as placid as an iced over lake. The only thing that betrayed him was that he wouldn't meet Colin's eyes. Not even out of defiance, not even to show him he wasn't affected by him. That's how Colin knew he wasn't the only one who thought the air in that elevator was too thick to breathe.

When Colin woke up in the quiet of Wes's apartment again, he wondered how many more nights he would get to spend there. He had been looking for somewhere to stay, but every time he thought he might have something, it fell through. He just didn't make enough working part time to pay even a small share of the rent. That made him a charity case. And so far, only Wes wanted to take him in.

Later that morning, he and Wes went their separate ways after another breakfast. This time, they ate at a bagel joint that smelled like smoked fish but made up for it with the taste of some amazing bagels and lox. It was funny how Wes went to all these different places to eat. The people who served them or took their orders behind counters all acknowledged Wes in low key ways. They didn't treat him like an old, dear customer. It was the same with the waitresses at the diner. They all treated Wes like someone that they knew, from long experience, preferred to be left alone.

When Wes took him to breakfast, the people acknowledged Colin in a similar way but with a subtle question in their eyes. The questioning expression was quickly set aside as if to say, "none of my business." Those looks made Colin wonder again if maybe he looked like a prostitute. Did those looks mean "Look at that guy buying his whore breakfast"? But maybe he was just being paranoid, and they just thought he was Wes's boyfriend.

Whatever the looks meant, they weren't a big deal. What he hated was that every time he left might be the last time he saw Wes. Every morning as Colin said, "See you", he saw a goodbye in Wes's eyes and that worried him.

Colin wasn't sure if he would have the courage to go back to his

place without being asked. How long could he stand it, not seeing Wes day after day? He didn't have very good impulse control. He probably wouldn't be able to stop himself. Throwing away the last shreds of his pride, Colin would march himself right up there and demand to be let back into Wes's life.

It was reassuring to see Wes at Penny's every night. He took it for granted that he always ate there since it was so close to his place. He asked Tamaya about him since he usually sat in her section.

"He's a good tipper, so I guess I should thank you," she said to Colin with a smirk.

"Me?"

"Aha. He used to come in here maybe every other week, not every day. And he never ordered dessert," she said and looked Colin up and down. "What have you been doing to that man?"

"So you're saying I'm good for business."

"Aha."

"Tell Mr. Snyder so he'll give me more hours," Colin told her.

Colin still didn't take it for granted that Wes would show up every night or that he would ask him to spend the night. When Wes did show up and invited him back, Colin would move on to a different question. When would Wes finally cave in and fuck him?

Chapter 4

It was another day spent telling himself that he wouldn't invite him back, followed by a walk to the diner to ask Colin to spend another night at his place. Just one more night, the last one. But on every walk to the diner, Wes tried to shut out a whispered hope inside him that Colin hadn't found anywhere else to stay, that no one had made him a better offer, that no one had stolen him away. Then Wes would get to play the good Samaritan again.

Too quickly Wes had gotten addicted to Colin. Was that another thing he inherited from his mother? An addictive personality would be one more thing to fear, another time bomb in his genes.

Wes raised his face to the cold wind. He felt its force as it stole his breath and the warmth from his skin. He had never minded the cold, but he knew this was the kind of weather that made you grit your teeth and lower your head so you could push through to where you were determined to go. In Wes's case, the will that determined his actions didn't seem like his own. He felt like he had given up control to the lowest part of himself. But he wasn't merely selfishness that drove him. The colder the weather got, the less he wanted to see Colin spend a night out there.

Without fail, Wes had invited Colin to spend the night at his place every night for a week. Every morning as he worked, Wes would listen for the sounds of Colin getting out of bed. Then he would give him some time to get ready.

This morning he did the same thing then went into the living room where Colin was waiting, looking out at the skyline. As seen through the apartment windows, the morning was deceptively sunny. In fact it was freezing out there. Maybe that's why Colin looked so glum as he leaned next to the window.

"Are you ready for breakfast?" Wes asked him.

"Sure. I guess." Colin immediately looked more alert but not more cheerful.

"You're not hungry?"

"Oh, I'm hungry. It's just breakfast equals getting kicked out of

paradise."

"You don't even like this place," Wes pointed out to him.

"It's warm, and it's indoors," Colin said as he got his jacket on.

It didn't look thick enough to Wes. He wondered if he should offer to buy him a better one. He could use better shoes too. Did he even have gloves? What Colin needed most was a place to live. Was Wes ready to offer him that?

They were standing by the front door when Wes took a leap. "Maybe we can come to an arrangement," he said before he thought twice and stopped himself.

"You said you didn't want to," Colin reminded him.

"A different arrangement."

"Like what?"

"I keep inviting you over. We might as well make it official." Now that the decision was made, Wes was at peace with it, kind of like a jumper who already stepped off the ledge. It was too late for second thoughts now.

"And what do you get out of the deal?" Colin wanted to know.

"You are kind of nice to have around."

Colin looked surprised by that answer. "What about sex?"

"That's off the table. I don't need your moral ruin on my conscience."

"That's a little melodramatic. I'm legal. Isn't that all that counts?" Colin asked. He was looking at Wes with intense, teasing eyes, almost like he wanted to persuade him.

"No," Wes told him and led the way out.

On the way down in the elevator, Colin shifted nervously. "Listen up. It's confession time. Two nights ago, this friend of mine from high school said I could crash at his place for the night, but I took a chance and held out for a better offer."

Wes couldn't help but feel flattered. He was glad that he scraped up enough courage to make Colin that better offer. But he was afraid too. He had taken a blind step not knowing where it would lead. One thing he knew was that it now felt different to walk with Colin by his side. It felt wonderful and terrifying.

*

It was so much sweeter going up to Wes's place now that he kind of lived there. And it wasn't just then, Colin's whole day was sweeter now that he knew for sure that he would sleep indoors and also that he was guaranteed to see Wes. To someone who didn't know him, Wes looked so cold, but he was warm deep inside where it counted.

Colin didn't know it could feel so good just to be around someone. Even if Wes was in the next room, always working, he was still somehow good company. And he was more accepting of Colin and his ways than he expected. Wes even let him put his feet up on the coffee table. Colin only did that out of habit. Even if Wes didn't make him feel bad about it, he put his feet down whenever he remembered. Wes was being really good to him, Colin wanted to show him how much that meant to him in as many ways as he could.

Today he had decided to go grocery shopping after he finished work. As he came through the apartment door, Colin savored the happy feeling of being home, kind of. Wes was right there to complete the moment. Seeing that Colin was bringing in two grocery bags, Wes looked appalled.

"It's just for breakfast," Colin said quickly, afraid that he had broken Wes's no food in the house rule.

"Are you using your own money to buy food?" Wes asked.

"Just a little," Colin said, relieved that Wes wasn't mad at him.

"I'll buy food, anything you want. Please save your money," Wes implored him.

"I want to contribute," Colin told him as he set the bags on the kitchen counter.

"You can make us breakfast, but don't spend any more of your money," Wes told him.

Colin agreed and hoped he had some natural breakfast making talent to make up for his lack of skill.

*

Wes wondered just how different his life was going to be while Colin lived with him.

"You'll have food in the fridge and me to keep you company,"

Colin declared as he put away the food he bought.

If someone like Colin was living there with him, why shouldn't there be food in the house? Obviously all rules were going out the window. His apartment was neither as quiet nor as clean as it used to be despite Colin's efforts to be good. He was just too young and alive to live by Wes's rules.

His rules weren't meant for Colin anyway. They were for Wes. An orderly life calmed his fears. Order equaled sanity, though maybe he did take it to an unhealthy extreme as Colin liked to point out. Having grown up with his grandparents watching him with worry, afraid that one day he would become like his mother, Wes had internalized their fear for his sanity. However well-meaning they might have been, they had marked him for life.

Since he was a child, Wes had been living a gray life. Colin wasn't meant for that kind of existence. He was like a bright blue sky looking over a pallid, winter landscape, willing it to come back to life.

Even though he couldn't change the way he was, Wes didn't want to be a stifling influence on Colin. And anyway, Wes wasn't sure he could deny him anything. A smile just looked too good on him.

The next morning Wes got to taste what Colin could do when he had the ingredients.

"Colin, you do know that eggs shouldn't be crunchy?" Wes said.

Colin was across from him at the dining table, eagerly waiting for his reaction to the scrambled eggs he made.

"I broke the eggs too hard and some eggshell got in," Colin explained and poked at his own plate of eggs, looking for debris.

"Did you think it would dissolve?"

"I tried to pick it out."

"I appreciate the effort, but this is really unpleasant. Just boil the eggs next time." Wes wished he could force himself to eat the food for Colin's sake, but there was no way, not even for Colin.

"Boiled eggs, yummy," Colin said sarcastically.

"At least they would be edible. Just try to keep the eggshell on the outside of the egg."

Colin slumped down.

"I thought cooking would be easy. Those cooks at the diner are all crack, crack, flip, flip, slap it down, done."

"I'm never eating there again," Wes said as he dumped his eggs in the trash and put two slices of bread in the toaster. "Try to make something fit for human consumption even if it's just toast."

"I don't know. You do set the bar pretty high," Colin said as his eggs went into the trash as well.

Since Colin had gone to work, Wes took the opportunity to use his room for its original purpose. As he went in, he looked at the futon made up for sleeping. Wes had bought two more pillows for Colin. Seeing that Wes had switched out his pillow with two new ones, Colin had demanded Wes's pillow back. For his own reasons, Wes refused to return it. It now smelled like Colin, and Wes wanted it for himself.

Averting his eyes from the rumpled sheets on the futon, Wes started his exercise routine. So close to where he slept, exertion mixed with thoughts of Colin brought to mind vivid fantasies. They swirled in Wes's mind as he drove himself harder and harder. Sporting a hard-on and sweating, he refused to touch himself. He wanted to send his cock a clear message that Colin was off limits, but he felt he might come just from thinking about him.

Colin didn't attempt an egg next morning. He just burned some toast for breakfast.

"Aren't you going to say anything about the burned toast?" Colin asked as he shmeared his slice with butter.

"No comment," Wes said as he ate his dry.

"I scraped some of the burned stuff off."

Wes gave him a wan look.

"I just have to fine-tune the toaster settings. Turn down the bass, turn up the treble," Colin said and bit into his toast.

When he went to put his plate in the dishwasher, Wes looked down as bits of bread crunched under his feet.

"There are crumbs all over the floor," Wes said.

"That's from scraping off the burned toast. You should put on slippers," Colin advised seeing that Wes was in his bare feet. "Aren't

your feet cold?"

"The solution to crumbs on the floor isn't to put on slippers. It's to clean the floor," Wes told him.

"Oh," Colin said like that course of action never occurred to him, and maybe it didn't. Living with straight guys, Colin was probably used to a level of filth Wes only remembered from his college days. To his credit, Colin did insist on cleaning up. Watching him try to figure out the vacuum and then drive it around the apartment like it was a racecar was quite a show.

Chapter 5

Wes usually ate dinner while Colin was at work. Following his old routine, Wes went to a different place each night. He hadn't stopped at the diner since the days when he went there to invite Colin to spend the night. Thinking back to those days made Wes miss them. It had been almost like he was having dinner in Colin's company.

It was still more than an hour until Colin had to go to work. That meant they could have dinner together. Wes found Colin in the living room. He was texting with someone, jabbing at the screen and shaking his head. Not wanting to interrupt him, Wes hung back. Colin caught sight of him anyway and held up his phone.

"He's giving me the third degree. Next, Tim will be asking if I've been eating my vegetables." Colin huffed in frustration.

Apparently he was done texting because he put away his phone.

"That's kind of what I wanted to ask you about. If you don't mind an early dinner, I'd like to take you out to eat," Wes offered.

Colin looked pleased, but he didn't say yes. Instead he told Wes, "I promise I won't try to cook anything. You don't have to take me out to eat. I always just grab something at Penny's."

"That's exactly why I'd like to take you out, so you can eat something different, somewhere different. And I'm not going out of my way. This is what I would normally do anyway."

"This early?" Colin asked skeptically.

"No. Not since I lived with my grandparents," he said ruefully.

"Remind me to ask for your life story sometime," Colin said as he got his jacket on, but Wes wasn't in any hurry to share the dreary details of his upbringing with him.

*

Colin was surprised and happy about Wes's dinner invitation. It was a step in the right direction, almost a date. Being out with Wes gave him a charge, stirring him up inside. That's not how Colin felt walking with a friend. Colin wondered if Wes was feeling it. Looking over at him, he couldn't tell.

It was only late afternoon. The sun was low, submerging whole blocks in shade as it hid behind buildings. Throwing long shadows ahead of them, Colin and Wes walked a dozen blocks to a big Chinese restaurant. The place was ornate, with lots of red, not one of those modern, too cool to be fun places.

The hostess was chatting on the phone in a foreign language when they went up to her. Her eyes fastened on Wes, and she beamed at him. Hurriedly, she hung up and put on a big, sincere smile, not a professional one. It was all for Wes. She barely glanced at Colin. The way she sparkled at the big, blond hunk, it was like she thought she stood a chance in hell. Sure, she was plenty cute, but that wasn't going to get her anywhere. As she showed them to their table, it was obvious she didn't have a clue that Wes was gay. Colin looked over at Wes to see if this was maybe his fault. And it was.

Colin waited until they were seated and the hostess was gone then he scolded Wes. "That poor, cute girl. Stop looking straight. It's false advertising. Not to mention you're always buried under baggy clothes. You are sending the wrong message to the wrong audience. Get some tight shirts and jeans, and you will be buried in an avalanche of cocks. I guarantee it."

Wes gave him one of his gray eyed, longsuffering looks. "You overestimate my appeal and also my cock requirements. I just need one or two occasionally, certainly not an avalanche of them."

"You don't want mine," Colin grumbled.

Wes said nothing.

"You know you could disagree with me and tell me how much you want me," Colin said, leaning over the table so Wes couldn't ignore him.

"My interest in you is well established and all in the past," Wes claimed.

"Oh, that better not be the truth," Colin warned him. "But seriously. You are not just depriving me of your hotness. Think of all the other guys out there who aren't getting an eyeful of you because you are hiding under more layers than a baglady."

"I guess I just don't have the same confidence in myself that you have in me." Wes was clearly mocking him, but Colin didn't care.

"You're a good-looking guy. Learn how to flaunt it."

"I remember you compared me to a vampire," Wes reminded him.

"Maybe I meant one of those sexy vampires."

"You didn't. You meant creepy, Nosferatu type vampire."

Colin didn't deny it. He only laughed. But the truth was he was finding Wes more attractive by the minute. Being out with him raised Colin's expectations, but nothing came of it, not even a kiss when Wes walked him to the diner.

When Colin came home, he again looked for some sign of thawing from Wes. Busy working, Wes couldn't even join him to hang out and watch TV or something.

To work off the sexual tension, Colin tried lifting some weights. Every piece of equipment he touched just reminded him of how good Wes must look when he's exercising. Frustrated, he shut the door and dropped on the futon and pushed down the front of his boxers quickly. His cock jumped out, stiff, needing relief. He cursed Wes for doing this to him.

He needed to come so bad, worse than when he first started jerking off and he spent every free moment with his cock in his fist. Now his body was arching right off the bed, muscles tight. His body was rising into his fist. How could his own familiar hand satisfy him? He needed more. He needed Wes. His fist almost turned cruel around his cock. He needed Wes so much. He was dripping with sweat, gritting his teeth so he wouldn't scream out for Wes, yell and curse at him. When he came, it was sharp and satisfying only as far as it went. He would never be truly satisfied until Wes made him come.

Colin was up earlier than usual because Becky got some work and told him he could get in on the action. Her cousin worked for a carpet cleaning service, and he arranged for Becky to distribute their flyers. Colin went along to help her and to get paid a little for his trouble.

Becky was sweet and a little ditzy. She usually lost every job she got within two weeks, a month tops. If Colin didn't help her study, she would have already flunked her community college classes. It was the same way in high school.

Colin and Tim had known her forever, since they lived next door to Becky's Polish grandmother, and she used to babysit all three of them. Becky's crush on Tim probably dated back to those days. Too bad for her Tim liked his women stacked. He also preferred brunettes, though for a truly stacked girl he'd make an exception. Becky was a tiny redhead. She didn't qualify for an exception.

Since she was curious about where he was living, Colin had Becky meet him at Wes's.

"Is it OK if a friend of mine drops in because she's on her way up, and I don't want to slam the door in her face?" Colin said to Wes, who sighed.

Colin took that as a yes and watched as Wes continued dumping the crumbs from the toaster into the sink. That took him back. The only person Colin had ever seen cleaning out a toaster was his mother. Everyone else just assumed the crumbs got sucked into an alternate dimension or something, and Colin did too.

To announce her arrival, Becky knocked continuously until Colin opened the door.

"We heard you the first time," Colin told her as he swung the door open. "Not everyone is your deaf grandmother." Becky's grandmother was hard of hearing, and she also didn't speak any English. She was a fun babysitter.

"Wow," Becky said as she saw Wes and craned her neck to look up at him.

Colin introduced them, but Becky was still gaping at Wes so she missed his attempt at a handshake. The good news was that Wes didn't seem irritated that Colin had invited her with no notice and without really asking. He was such a tolerant guy, but Colin still decided to get Becky out of there before she tried to start a conversation with him.

"He's a scary guy," Becky said once they were in the elevator. "I bet he could break me in half like a Popsicle stick and not even break a sweat."

"I got you out of there just in time, didn't I?" Colin said to her.

"You know my mom always said she didn't want a dog she couldn't take in a fight. That's why she has all those tiny, yippy dogs," Becky

said. Colin thought they were no longer on the subject of Wes, but he was wrong. "That is not a dog you can take in a fight," she told him and pointed up as they stepped off the elevator.

"Wes is the sweetest dog ... I mean guy." Colin glared at her. She was going to rot his brain.

When Colin got back from littering the town with flyers, he saw that there was a bed in the weight room. The futon was gone and the exercise equipment was pushed back to make more room.

"What's this?" he asked Wes, who came to stand next to him in the doorway.

"It's your new bed. It was just delivered. You don't like it?" Wes said when he saw how Colin reacted to it.

"I was hoping to graduate from the futon to your bed, not my own," Colin said frowning at him. "And thank you," he added with a lopsided grin.

"You're welcome," Wes told him as if his thank you hadn't followed a complaint. But Colin really was hoping that Wes would feel guilty about making him sleep on the uncomfortable futon and invite him into his own bed. That's where he wanted to be. It was nice of Wes to get him a real bed, but he hoped it would soon become just another place for him and Wes to have sex.

"Did you already have lunch?" Wes asked him.

"I had a hot dog, but I worked that off. I'll just grab something."

"I can make us sandwiches," Wes offered.

"You haven't had lunch?" Colin asked. This late, he was sure he had.

"I was waiting for you," Wes said as he got stuff out of the fridge.

"Aha, you like my company," Colin said as he crowded Wes in front of the fridge.

"Of course I like your company, that's why you're here."

"Yeah, but you like like my company. You crave me. You pine for me, and all that good shit."

"Don't flatter yourself."

"It was love at first sight, or you wouldn't have invited me up here. Put more mayo on that," he said seeing that Wes was shortchanging him on the good stuff while loading his sandwich with lettuce.

"Offering to pay you for sex isn't love at first sight."

"From you, it is. I bet it's not just anyone..." Colin started to say, but Wes cut him off.

"I've paid for it before. I'll pay for it again."

"Not as long as I'm here. You pay a guy even to shake your hand, and there'll be hell to pay."

"I can usually get a handshake for free."

"You can get everything for free." Colin looked at him significantly.

Wes refused to acknowledge the look and set one of the sandwiches he made in front of him. Colin moaned in appreciation as he took the first bite.

"I know it's not that good," Wes told him.

"I'm just practicing," Colin said and winked at him.

Chapter 6

For a while now Colin had been looking for a better job and also lobbying for more hours at Penny's. The manager at Penny's came through for him after he had a screaming, cursing fight with his nephew and he quit. Now Colin had his job.

"I have bad news. They are giving me more hours at the diner," Colin told Wes as soon as he got home.

"You won't be cooking?" Wes looked a little horrified.

"No."

"Then why is it bad news?"

"I might make enough money to be able to move out of here."

"But you don't have to. You're welcome to stay."

"Good," Colin said, cheering up immediately. "I'll be washing dishes plus bussing for lunch and dinner."

"That's a lot of hours," Wes said with a slight frown.

"I told you it was bad news." Colin smiled and said, "And I'm going to miss you too."

"I said nothing about missing you."

"But I heard it loud and clear. And thank you for wanting me to stay." Both of those things were really nice to hear. All in all, it was an awesome day.

It had been almost a week since Colin started working the new hours. That night, after he came home, he went straight to Wes's office. There was only one chair in there so Colin dragged in a chair from the dining room and dropped into it. He squirmed trying to get comfortable.

"That's not the most comfortable place to sit in this apartment," Wes said to him.

"Location, location, location," he said and each time pointed at Wes.

"I thought we agreed that my work was too boring to watch."

"I need my daily dose of you. Unless you want me to watch you sleep?"

"No, thank you."

"It's because I'm at work most of the day now. I kind of miss you," Colin said.

"Lets find you something better to watch," Wes said and got up from his desk.

Colin was up in a flash invading Wes's personal space.

"You missed me too," Colin said as he raised his arms like he was going in for a hug. The warning look Wes gave him kept him from doing that and everything else he wanted to do.

"When I release all this pent up frustration, you will not be able to stand for a week," Colin promised as he followed Wes into the kitchen.

Wes made them some snacks. Colin stretched out on the couch with Wes in the armchair. Then Wes vetoed every awesome horror movie Colin wanted to watch. Colin punished him with an 80's action flick.

It was just nice to sit with him after work. That's what couples did. Colin didn't know he would be into that. He expected to have some casual fun for a good long time before he settled on that one guy he wanted to stick with. But there he was, the one guy. These days Colin was finding that other men didn't catch his eye the way they used to. They were something to look at, not something he wanted. What man could possibly compare to Wes?

When he thought about that, Colin had to take a deep breath. He never realized that knowing what you wanted most in the world could be so terrifying. He wanted Wes. He had to have Wes, and if he didn't he felt like he would die. Lusting after Wes so hard, he hadn't noticed when his feelings leaped right over lust into... Just thinking about it, that word got stuck in his throat.

"Are you sure about this movie?" Wes asked him. He must have noticed that Colin was having a quiet meltdown while Cynthia Rothrock kicked ass on the screen.

"Have you ever been in love?" Colin asked.

"No," Wes said without even having to think about it.

"It's scary as hell," Colin informed him.

"Compared to those movies you like to watch?"

"Way worse."

"I believe you," Wes told him with a small smile. To Colin, it

looked like Wes knew what he was talking about. Maybe they were scared of the same thing.

Later that night Colin was up for a piss. He kept his eyes half closed so he wouldn't wake up all the way. Coming back from the bathroom, he saw a sight that had him opening his eyes wide. Wes's bedroom door was ajar. Wes was changing for bed while at the same time looking at something on a tablet sitting on his bed. His back was turned as he slowly got into a t-shirt and sweats. Muscles rippled across his back as he pulled on the t-shirt. It hung loosely from his impossibly broad shoulders, but Colin could still see his powerfully built body underneath. As Wes got into his sweats, Colin could see that his thighs were thick with muscles. His ass was firm. Every inch of him was exercised into the shape of Colin's dreams. Colin gritted his teeth. Catching this forbidden sight showed him everything he was being denied.

Feeling guilty, Colin stepped away from there before Wes noticed him. Sneaking a look had been its own punishment. That stolen glimpse at Wes's body was already driving him crazy. It wasn't fair. He was so close. Why was Wes so stubborn?

Back in his room, Colin closed the door and leaned heavily against it. He squeezed himself through his clothes. Already hard, he stiffened even more under the pressure of his hand. Hurriedly, Colin pushed his sweatpants and his boxers to his knees. He willed himself not to grip too hard, not to stroke too fast. He raked his other hand down his thigh and dug in his fingers hard. Make it last, make it count, he told himself as he replayed what he had seen. Wes's body was a wall of muscle that he wanted to climb. He wanted to ride him, suck him, love him until he couldn't breathe. With his fist moving fast, Colin mouthed his name like he was calling to him. He willed his passion to reach Wes and break down everything that stood between them.

*

With Colin going in to work earlier these days, mornings seemed even more precious to Wes. That's when Colin would attempt to

feed him. Colin had done a decent job with scrambled eggs for a while now. That morning when he got up, Wes found Colin at the stove. Two eggs were already out of the pan and on a plate.

"You started breakfast already?"

"I'm perfecting the over easy. It's living up to its name. I'm doing OK so far." Colin pointed to the plate with two eggs, and Wes set the plate in front of his usual chair.

"Not those. They're already cold. I'll have those two. I'm making you fresh ones. But the coffee is ready."

"You can have the fresh ones. I'll have these," Wes told him as he sat down with a cup of black coffee.

"No way! I have dibs on those." Colin snatched the plate away from him.

"The eggs are good," Wes told him once they both sat down to eat. "But I feel bad that you're eating cold ones."

"I had to make sure I could get them right. Just you wait, I'm going to be an egg expert, an eggspert."

"It's too early for puns. But these are really good eggs. Thank you."

While he was helping Colin do the dishes, Wes told him, "I appreciate you perfecting eggs for me, but I don't want you eating cold eggs for my sake."

Colin just shrugged it off. "Like it's some big sacrifice. It's not like I served you up one of my own kidneys."

Wes cringed at the image. It reminded him of those terrible horror movies Colin liked to watch.

Wes was surprised that Colin wanted to keep living with him even when he had other choices. He expected that living with him would wear on Colin after the first few days when he was just glad to have a place to live. It must have been Colin's irrepressible nature.

In the beginning, Wes couldn't imagine how Colin would fit into his dull, carefully ordered life, but somehow he did. It was almost as if all this time Wes had moved through his life in such a way as to leave a space for Colin, for when he finally arrived to fill it. Now that he was there, he shook things up, Wes himself more than anything.

Wes was deeply unsettled by his presence. All his painful, hopeless

longings finally had a shape and a name. Colin had stepped into his life to be the embodiment of everything Wes could never have. It was as if Wes had sought out Colin and invited him home just so he could torture himself.

*

On his day off, Colin went to have lunch with Tyson and Lau. The streets were pure slush. Car roofs were fuzzy with snow. It wasn't snowing now. Colin looked up to see what the sky was up to. The clouds looked smudged every which way. Some crazy, high winds had pulled them in every direction.

Taking the long walk to see Tyson and Lau reminded Colin of the bad old days. Having to walk the streets and waste time before he had a place to live did have a few advantages. Colin got to know the town pretty well. There were all sorts of interesting places hidden away. He also got to meet Tyson and Lau. He caught them getting hot and heavy against one of the columns under Fareborough Bridge. Dizzy and walleyed from hunger and lack of sleep, he had stared at them like they were a mirage or free porn. Watching two cute, skinny guys going at it, all hands and lips and tongues, Colin just grinned at them stupidly.

In his loopy state of mind, he was a shameless voyeur. Even when they noticed him, he didn't retreat. It didn't take them long to figure out that he wasn't in great shape. They bought him a burger, and Tyson let him sleep in the back of his Mom's car. Neither one could offer him much help though. Tyson lived in a dorm, and Lau had a houseful of relatives driving him crazy.

They felt bad that they couldn't do more for him, but Colin was happy just to have met them. Tyson had told him that he worked at Keystone Books, and Colin made sure to drop by on his aimless walks. Every time he did, Tyson tried to give him food or money or both. Colin had to refuse the money. He didn't want Tyson to think he stopped by for that. It was the same way with Lau. Colin appreciated the help, but he wanted them as friends.

Now that he had more money and a place to live, Colin could relax around them a little bit. They still treated him like he was their

stupid, little brother. Like Colin didn't get enough of that crap from Tim. Lau and Tyson were in college and a little older than Colin so they thought they knew everything.

To try and establish himself as an equal, Colin insisted on treating Lau to lunch. When they were done, they ordered a salad with no dressing to take to Tyson so he could stay skinny as a whip. Timing was everything when they visited Tyson at the bookstore where he worked. Around 1:00 was when the manager of Keystone Books was out to lunch, and they could hang out with Tyson for a while.

Tyson ate his salad while Colin told them how things were not going anywhere with Wes.

"If he can tolerate your motormouth, you're in," Lau told him offhandedly.

"I'm not a motormouth. I'm a witty guy!" Colin insisted.

"If you want him to take you more seriously, maybe you should act more mature," Tyson suggested then took another forkful of his salad.

"What do you mean more mature?" Colin asked.

"Not like yourself," Tyson told him.

"No way. This party is come as you are." Colin had already decided not to put on an act for Wes.

"You're not as charming as you think you are," Lau informed him. "You should be a lot more insecure about yourself. Lose some self-confidence, and you might land yourself that guy."

"Did I come in here wearing a kick me sign?" Colin wondered. He felt up his back to make sure.

"You were born with it," Lau told him.

"Seriously, man, try to be cool. Look at me as an example. When in doubt, ask yourself, 'What would Tyson do?'"

"Tyson would act all smug and superior and like a total bitch," Colin told him.

"See what I'm talking about," Tyson said to Lau, who shook his head like Colin was a hopeless case.

Stupid college boys.

As soon as he got home, Colin barged into Wes's office.

"Am I a motormouth?" he asked in an angry tone, startling Wes.

"No?"

"Was that a question or an answer?"

Wes smiled. "You are exactly as talkative as you should be," Wes told him.

"What does that mean?"

"It was too quiet here before. You bring life and noise."

"I'm not noise," Colin objected.

"When you're gone, it reminds me of the bad old days. That's when I play back something stupid you said. I hear your voice in my head, and it makes me smile."

"You could just turn on the TV," Colin said both annoyed and happy. He couldn't get enough of hearing that Wes liked having him around.

*

Wes had grown up too quietly except for those times when his mother would show up to shout incoherently. Living with his grandparents had been like living in another time. In his grandparents' apartment, there was one small TV and no cable. He was more likely to hear the clock chime than any other sound. It was a quiet house where voices were never raised.

His grandparents had murmured conversations sometimes about Wes, sometimes about his mother. They didn't like to mention her to Wes, as if she was better forgotten even before she was dead. The few times Wes had seen her, she didn't seem to recognize him.

His mother died from a fall down a staircase. Everyone was surprised that it wasn't an overdose or suicide but an accident that took her. Wes felt the loss sharply though he couldn't say exactly what he had lost.

His grandmother was particularly hard hit. She stared at the pictures of his mother as a little girl – her little girl. His grandfather's face was like weathered granite. It was hard to tell what he felt, but more and more he let a book or the newspaper sit on his lap while he stared blankly at nothing. Wes was sure that they both grieved for the girl taken away from them by schizophrenia more than the one taken away from them by a fall down a staircase. He remembered

their haggard looks as they said, "She's at peace now." Wes questioned the meaning behind those words, if they meant that she was better off.

While Wes was lost in thought, Colin had been gazing at him. There was no scrutiny in his eyes. They shone with a mellow happiness. It was a look Wes had seen in his eyes more and more, a look that made his eyes impossibly beautiful.

Wes told himself to look away. By now he had lost count of how many times he had to tell himself to look away from some enticing, mesmerizing part of Colin. It was the impulse that followed looking that he feared. He could feel Colin reaching out, undoing his self control like he was slowly working his buttons out if their buttonholes and sliding down his zipper.

Colin was at his most seductive when he wasn't trying. That's when he was most purely himself, and his beauty poured out radiant and untouched. Wes noticed that, at that moment, the silence between them was frighteningly intimate. Wes wanted to thank Colin for always talking so much and distracting him from how beautiful he was.

Chapter 7

The day had been cold but bright and clear. Now it was only evening, and it already looked like night had fallen. Colin had been in and out since morning, seeing his friends then coming in to complain to Wes about them. Since Colin had a day off and no plans, Wes was ready to take him out to dinner. He looked forward to it, but Colin had his own agenda.

"I'm taking the lead on this one," he said and insisted that they go out somewhere new. "I almost have a real job now so I'm taking you out."

To his surprise, Wes immediately said, "OK."

Wes's cooperation caught Colin off balance.

"I was ready to battle to the death. You took all the air out of me," Colin complained as they got their jackets on.

"Sorry."

"No, it's good. I'll save it for next time."

Frost framed the windows. Fat, feathery snowflakes floated down lazily then caught on their clothes and hair. It was one of those cheerful winter nights when people brave the sharp bite of the cold wind and go out. Wes knew many of them must be Christmas shoppers. He hadn't been one of them since he was a boy. Now he looked over at Colin and wondered what he should buy him.

From the streets lined with brightly decorated stores, they walked for blocks with Wes having no idea where they were going. He was curious to find out where Colin would take him. That was part of the reason why he agreed. Now he found himself wondering if that was such a good idea.

"Where are we going?" Wes asked since they had turned into a street with several bars of the garish and noisy variety.

"Somewhere new," Colin said. "And remember tonight is on me."

Of all the awful places they might have gone, Colin stopped in front of a karaoke place called Okay Karaoke. Wes had some small hope that this was only a joke, and that once he had Wes going, Colin would move on to their real destination. No such luck. Colin

shook the snow out of his hair as he led the way inside. They took a seat at one of the small tables off to one side. The place was mostly full. A young guy and a girl were already up on stage. The girl knew all the words while the guy did his best to keep up by reading the words off the screen a beat too late. Wes pictured being dragged up there to do a duet with Colin. It was not a pretty picture.

"You know nothing can induce me to go up there," Wes told Colin.

"What if I was up there naked?"

Wes just gave him a look.

"Just relax and enjoy the bad singing," Colin told him as he got the attention of a waiter.

The place didn't serve real food, only various appetizers and drinks, mostly drinks. Wes refused to order anything alcoholic. He could hold his liquor. He had more than proven that in college. But with a microphone and Colin within easy reach, tonight Wes wasn't taking any chances.

"I was hoping to sneak sips from your glass," Colin complained seeing that there would be no real drinks at their table.

"Then it's a good thing I ordered mineral water," Wes told him.

"Is that your way of keeping me off the stage?" Colin asked. "Nothing can keep me from going up there."

"I wouldn't dream of it," Wes assured him.

Colin wasn't bluffing. He went up to the stage eagerly. He picked a song called "The Story". Wes didn't know it, but that would be true of almost any song anyone might name. He didn't really make music part of his life. On the other hand, Colin was often singing along to whatever was blaring through his headphones.

Wes couldn't deny that the song touched him. It combined the truth that each of them had to speak to the other. More than the words, it was the way Colin sang. Colin closed his eyes while he sang the words he knew by heart. Typical Colin, he didn't hold back. He sang like he was ripping the words out of his body and flinging them into the air to fly to Wes. He wanted to reach Wes's heart with his voice. That isn't to say that his singing was any good.

"How was it?" Colin asked after it was over and he dropped into his chair, a little breathless.

"That was passionate," was the best Wes could manage.

"Passionate?" Colin said like he knew he was being insulted. "You mean loud."

"Very."

"Did I embarrass you?" Colin challenged him.

"Not at all."

"I was singing to you, you know," Colin said, looking worried that Wes hadn't noticed that.

"It was nice," Wes said. Wes couldn't take his eyes off him even for one second while he was singing. Naked emotion looked so good on him.

All next day, Colin's awful singing filled the apartment until he went to work. Even after he was gone, Wes's ears were ringing with the sound. It was truly terrible, but it only made Wes smile.

It was odd that living with Colin wasn't more difficult for him. So far, resisting Colin was the biggest challenge of their arrangement, not all the little things that should have been bothering him. The last time Wes had lived with anyone was in college. After living with his grandparents, it was an adventure and a big adjustment. But bigger changes were to follow. His grandparents were still alive when Wes started college. By the time he graduated, he had lost both of them within a year of each other.

At graduation, his college life came to an end along with all the tenuous connections he made. With the death of his grandparents and the cutting of his college ties, Wes was more alone than ever. But there was one connection he made in college that stayed strong. Pete, his roommate for four years, never let Wes feel completely alone. A tenacious, beer guzzling, oaf with no social boundaries, Pete stayed in touch even after he moved away. Until Colin came into his life, Pete was Wes's strongest link to the human race. They only talked on the phone most of the time, but Wes could count on at least one phone call a week. More if Pete was fired up about something or needed to vent.

Pete was pretty cheerful today and just wanted to touch base. While he was on the phone with Pete, Wes felt duty bound to tell him he had gone to a karaoke bar. That was the kind of thing Pete liked to hear, but usually Wes could only share news about his work.

Just as he was telling him about Colin, Wes could hear him coming into the apartment noisily, yelling, "Hi, honey, I'm home!"

"How's it going with your guy?" Pete asked.

"It's like living with a rambunctious puppy," Wes told him.

"Is that bad?"

"It has its moments." Wes smiled to himself.

"Always wants to hump your leg, wants you to pet him, play with him?"

"That's uncannily accurate," Wes admitted.

"I wouldn't mind one of those, but a girl," Pete told him.

"Get yourself a dog. They're less trouble," Wes advised him.

"Either way I would want to pet them and play with them all the time, and I wouldn't get any work done," Pete said.

After that they talked about work for a while. At the end Wes said, "Good luck with everything, Pete. I hope I'll get to see you soon." He hung up and saw Colin eyeing him from the doorway of his office.

"Who's Pete and can I take him in a fight?" Colin asked. There was a stern look on his face, and his arms were folded over his chest.

"That would depend on how many beers he's had. Pete is my roommate from college. As two nerds, we had a lot in common except for one thing. He's straight. I was sure we would drift apart after graduation, but he made sure to keep in touch. One drunken night in our dorm room after my grandparents died, I told him all about myself and how I didn't have any living family and few friends. He said he would make sure I always had at least one old college buddy I could count on."

"He sounds like a good guy. Did you have a hopeless, unrequited crush on him?" Colin asked, leaning forward and staring at Wes accusingly.

Instead of saying anything, Wes put up a picture of Pete on one of the monitors. There he was in all his glory – glasses, beard, baseball cap, beer belly and all.

"Your friend Pete is Peter Jackson! Or is that Michael Moore? I have trouble telling them apart."

"Still jealous?" Wes asked him.

"Jealous? What are you talking about?" Colin said waving his hand

dismissively then he frowned. "You're not into big, scruffy bears, are you?"

"No," Wes said as he showed him another picture. "That's the two of us on Halloween. A few people nicknamed us Bigfoot and Yeti. Pete talked me into dressing the part," Wes said as Colin cracked up.

"It's perfect! Put that on my phone. It's going to be my screensaver," he demanded.

Since Wes was basically unrecognizable in the costume, he indulged him. He remembered that the costume had been incredibly hot and scratchy, but the night had been fun.

Colin showed him a picture on his phone.

"That's me as a mummy," he said.

"How do you know? That could be anyone," Wes said since he was completely wrapped up.

"Just take my word for it. We ripped up an old sheet, and Tim wrapped me up and poked me with safety pins a million times. Our mom was working late. We turned off all the lights, and I jumped out and scared her. She threw her purse at me. Got me right in the nose. Then she recognized my voice going, 'Ow, ow, ow.' So she consoled me and yelled at me. Tim got the classic, 'You should know better.' He always got the worst of it, but I was the real troublemaker." Colin started out smiling at the memory, but then his smile faded. "I wish I had been a good kid. I should have made my mom's life easier, made her happy."

"I'm sure you did," Wes told him. He could see tears in Colin's eyes.

Colin looked at him like he wanted to believe him, but he just couldn't. He probably felt guilty for every little prank and misbehavior that didn't matter in the least. He was burdened with small transgressions that his mother had forgiven and forgotten as soon as she looked into Colin's eyes. Wes was as sure of that as if he had been there to see it.

It felt good to sit with Colin in the evening as it got dark outside. Usually it was already night when he got home. There was something sweet about being with someone as darkness fell. Maybe it was the assurance of not being alone. It did come at a price

though. Colin got to choose what they watched. Wes always vetoed the horror movies. That took care of Colin's top contenders. So it was 80's action movies again. It was a little disturbing that Colin could quote so much of the dialogue.

As the credits rolled at the end of the movie, Colin muted the TV. During the movie, Colin had shifted little by little until he was leaning against Wes. The length of his body along Wes's side was hot and tempting. Wes deliberately stilled his hands and willed himself not to turn to Colin and lay him flat, not to spread his legs and fit himself between them so he could grind into him. He took a slow, deep breath. Colin noticed his struggle for self-control.

"You're fighting this too hard. This can't just be about my age and how much sex I've had and the even more sex that I haven't had," Colin said.

"It's not."

"Then tell me about it. You told Pete your life story, why not me."

"So you are jealous of Pete."

"Whatever. Talk."

Wes considered it and realized that he wanted Colin to know and understand.

"Are you sure you want to hear about it?"

"I'm a terrible listener. But yes, I do."

Wes had been raised by his grandparents while his mother went in and out of mental institutions. On top of her mental issues, she was also a drug user. It might have been her way of medicating herself, but it only worsened her condition.

Wes's grandparents were already middle-aged by the time they had his mother. Having already given up on having a child, they were surprised and overjoyed when they finally had a baby daughter. They felt blessed until she started having episodes in her teen years. She often ran away to come back unsure of where she had been. This went on for years.

When she was in her twenties, she came home with a new, unexplained change in her. Her parents noticed that her belly had grown. She was pregnant, but she refused to believe it. She was convinced that she had a tumor and wanted it cut out. During the rest of her pregnancy, she was committed to an institution so she

wouldn't hurt herself or her unborn baby. She couldn't name the father of her baby of course.

Once the child was born, Wes's grandparents took custody of him. They named him Wesley. Though they didn't see it that way at first, eventually they looked at Wes the same way they had looked at their daughter when she came so unexpectedly. Wes's grandmother often told him, "You're our second blessing." She whispered it to him while she stroked his hair before he went to sleep. But Wes felt more like a curse. He had stolen the peace of their last years. He did everything he could not to make them worry about him, but for the rest of their lives they were afraid that he would end up like his mother.

As he listened, Colin guessed that Wes lived with the same fear.

"You're afraid you'll end up like her," he said.

"I was more worried when I was younger. But so far so good."

"That explains so much."

"I don't need to be explained," Wes objected.

"Yes, you do. You're afraid to be happy with someone because you think that one day you'll start acting crazy."

"There is a time bomb in my genes."

"Your jeans, mmmm," Colin said as he looked down and grinned.

He had turned a deadly serious conversation prurient without batting an eye. But really he was a good listener.

"What happened to your mom?" Colin asked, turning serious again.

"She fell down a flight of stairs and died."

"I'm sorry. Did you know her?"

"Not really. My grandparents never allowed her to be alone with me. They were afraid she would hurt me. Before I was born, she tried to cut me out of her belly." Wes paused. "When I think back to the look in her eyes, I'm not sure she even knew I was her child. Since she didn't know what I was, a tumor or a baby, I wouldn't expect her to know who I was either."

Colin hugged him. He said nothing just held on to Wes tightly. Holding his breath, Wes resisted hugging him back. This was exactly what he was trying to prevent, this disquieting closeness. Feeling the warmth of Colin's body fully against him both calmed and aroused him. Colin was very still. Wes could tell he wasn't

coming on to him. He just wanted Wes to feel his strength and take as much as he needed.

Chapter 8

That picture of Wes dressed as The Abominable Snowman made Colin want to check his phone every second. There was Wes under all that white fur, looking stoic and a little bewildered, or maybe drunk. Every time Colin looked at it while he was at work, it made him smile. He liked seeing proof that Wes had a playful side especially after hearing about his sad life. He wished Wes didn't always keep himself under wraps around Colin. They did have fun at the karaoke place. That was a positive sign of things to come. What Wes told him about himself was even more important. That wasn't exactly a fun time, but it meant a lot.

It was probably supposed to be a warning, but there wasn't a chance in hell Colin was going to give up on Wes. All Wes did was let him know what he was fighting, and Colin was ready for a fight.

Even when they were doing nothing, Colin was happy to be with Wes. It surprised him that he felt so good hanging out with someone who was so quiet and serious. He would have never in a million years guessed that big, blond, and silent was his type. Who would have thought it? Colin had accidentally stumbled over the one man for him, and he was even living with him. If only there was any sign of thawing from Wes. But it wasn't really that he was cold. He was closed off, and Colin now knew one more reason why Wes refused to get pulled in by Colin's personal vortex. How the hell did they go from here's three hundred now bend over to this complete sexual standstill?

As Colin was mulling over the conundrum of Wes and wiping a table, something reflected in the diner window caught his eye. Someone was lingering behind him. Even without turning, he recognized the reddish blond hair and the sneer Brad put on just for him.

Colin turned to face him. "What the fuck do you want?"

"Not to eat in this dump, that's for sure."

"Where the fuck do you get off? You're a wannabe pimp. And I have a real job now so go find someone else to pimp out," Colin told

him.

"Real job?" Brad said. "This? Cleaning grease off tables?"

"It's better than anything you have to offer."

"You think you're too good for that kind of shit? You're just too chicken. You don't want Tim to know what you really are. He still thinks you're his sweet little baby brother."

"Fuck off, Brad. I'm working," Colin told him.

Brad looked around with a disgusted expression and swaggered his way out.

A few minutes later, Wes stopped by to walk home with Colin. Brad had cleared out just in time.

Colin didn't like that Brad brought Tim into it. If he knew what was good for him, Brad wouldn't start anything with Tim, not even long distance. Brad just had to say one bad word about Colin, and Tim was likely to come at him like a freight train. Of course he might come after Colin right after that. Seriously, lighting a fire under Tim was the worst thing for all of them. Colin wished he could be sure that Brad knew that.

Though Wes let him fret and stew over Tim and Brad on their walk home, Colin's preoccupied state of mind didn't go unnoticed.

"Did you have a bad day?" Wes asked him as they hung up their jackets by the front door.

"Just a nasty visitor. That guy I told you about who kicked me out for not wanting to sell myself."

"What did he want?"

"To be a jerk. Maybe he thought after a taste of homelessness I might have changed my mind. Whatever. I told him where to shove it."

"Why were you living with someone like that?"

"Tim and I couldn't afford to be picky. Anyone who let us have a room or two was a good enough roommate. There was our drunk uncle. We lived with him for a while, but he had trouble controlling his temper especially around me. Then we moved in with this girl who was all hot for Tim, but kept hinting that I should get lost. At one point Tim was pretty sure she was trying to get herself pregnant. Like Tim needed that. So we ditched the crazy girl and ended up at Brad's. He was Tim's good buddy. Tim didn't know he was a creep."

"And he still doesn't know because you refuse to tell him."

"It's not like Brad is dangerous or something. He's just a sleazeball. Maybe he wants to build a porn empire or something."

"Porn?"

"First he wanted me to do stuff over webcam," Colin told him.

"It seems to me you would have been safer doing that than going home with strangers," Wes lectured him.

"I never did that," Colin said defensively.

"You came home with me," Wes reminded him.

"You offered. And you were all big and blond, so my dick said yes."

"Next time, don't let your dick answer."

"When a guy like you offers himself up, my dick does the talking," Colin told him.

"And what happened with your uncle?" Wes wanted to know as he made them grilled swiss and ham sandwiches.

"Uncle Hal was a drunk. It only got worse after our mom died. When I was still in high school, he let us live with him, but he didn't like it. I tried to stay away from him, give him his space."

Despite Colin's best efforts to steer clear of him, more and more Uncle Hal looked at him with mean eyes. It was a look that mixed disgust with rage. It was a look that promised a beating if Colin gave him any kind of excuse.

Colin kept his mouth shut around his uncle like he never had before in his life. Partly it was for his own sake, but it was also because of Tim. Living with their uncle took some pressure off Tim. As long as they lived with Uncle Hal, Tim could save some money and maybe go back to school. If Tim knew that trouble was brewing and that their uncle hated Colin, they would have to move out. Tim would be stuck working even harder to pay the rent, and going back to school would be just a fantasy.

To avoid his uncle, Colin stayed out of the house as much as he could. But Tim didn't like him roaming the streets. Colin couldn't tell him it was for the best. He did try to put his time to good use. Hoping to help Tim earn enough money to get them out of there, Colin picked up as many odd jobs as he could. He couldn't earn much. In the meantime, their uncle's drinking got worse. It got so

that Tim saw for himself that Uncle Hal had it in for Colin.

"I'll get us out of here," he promised Colin. But he couldn't get it done soon enough. One night Uncle Hal snapped.

"He tried to smash my head in with a booze bottle because I had the TV turned up too loud," Colin told Wes. "Tim stopped him. He wanted to kill Uncle Hal. I barely managed to talk him down. That's when we moved out. We struggled to make ends meet after that, but it beats getting your head caved in."

"I'm sorry you had to go through that," Wes said.

"When we lived with Uncle Hal, I was just starting to figure out I was gay. Call me dense. But I swear that Uncle Hal figured it out too. I think that's why he had it in for me." Colin wasn't sure about that. "Maybe I was just paranoid."

As he was trying to sort out facts from suspicions, Colin noticed the very grim look on Wes's face.

"Are you doing an impression of my brother? Because that's who you look like right now," Colin said.

"I don't like that someone tried to hurt you," Wes said simply.

"I'm still in one piece so you can relax."

"Of course," Wes said, letting go of his anger. "I'm glad your brother was there for you. It makes me think that your parents must have been good people."

"They were the best parents I ever had," Colin joked, but he couldn't escape the sadness even the best memories of them still carried. "Even after we lost our dad, I didn't know we could lose our mom too. I believed we were safe from any more bad things happening." Colin thought of it as extortion, buying protection. He forgot that with extortion, you have to keep paying. He didn't realize it even when their mom got sick. "When my mom went into the hospital, I thought all we had to worry about was the hospital bill, not that she would never come out of there. I was so confused when they told us she was gone. I knew they made a mistake. I barged into her room. They were unhooking her from all the machines, but I still didn't believe it. I felt this shaking, but I was so out of it, I didn't know what it was. It was Tim. He had grabbed hold of me, and he was shaking with sobs. That's how I knew it was true, because Tim was crying, and the only other time I had seen him cry was when our

dad died."

Wes grabbed Colin's hand, startling him. Then he startled him even more by pulling him into a hug. In his life Colin had never felt anything so good as being held by him.

Chapter 9

It was the lull between lunch and dinner. Becky had stopped by, and Colin brought her a plate of fries and sat down with her. While Becky munched on fries, Colin was bitching to her about how he wasn't getting any traction with Wes. They had gotten closer in some ways, but Colin was still sleeping alone.

"You should just climb into bed with him and sit on his dick. Then he won't be able to reject you," Becky told him as she dipped a fry in mustard then ketchup.

"You give the worst advice. Is that what you would do?" he asked her.

With a mouth full of fries, she nodded.

"I forbid you to make any more decisions. Ever," Colin told her. Actually, he was pretty sure her advice would work, but it wouldn't get him what he wanted. What Colin wanted, just as much as Wes's body, was his heart. Wes's heart seemed so frozen, but Colin knew a fire burned inside him. Colin just wasn't sure it would ever burn for him. Though he lived with him, Colin felt like he was always standing outside the door yelling, "Let me in! Let me in!"

As it got dark, Colin noticed that the weather outside the diner windows was getting worse every minute. Good thing Becky had already gone home. With the thick snow and strong, lashing winds, few people were coming in. The manager of Penny's decided to close up early so the staff could get home. Not having far to go, Colin wasn't worried. He still took a deep breath before he stepped outside and braced himself against the blizzard. Snowflakes were almost too small to see. Driven hard by the wind, they were whipped up, blinding him and pricking at his exposed skin. By the time he stepped into the lobby, his face was frozen. Walking into the apartment, Colin found Wes was putting on his jacket.

"You're not going anywhere in this weather," Colin told him.

"Was that an order?" Wes asked as he got out of his jacket and hung it up again.

"Yes. Where were you going anyway?" Colin wanted to know. He

wasn't in a hurry to take off his own jacket until he warmed up a little.

"I was coming to get you," Wes said. Colin could tell that he didn't like admitting it.

"Nice," Colin said and let Wes help him out of his jacket. He kept his gloves on for a little longer and slapped his hands together.

"Do you need better gloves?" Wes asked him.

"No. These are good. They're Tim's old ones." Tim had forced them on him while he bought cheap ones for himself after Colin lost his. Replacing them was like saying Tim's gloves weren't good enough. That was out of the question.

Wes nodded and smiled. He seemed to understand without any sort of explanation why Colin had to keep the gloves Tim gave him.

"I'm still cold. Let's get cozy," Colin demanded. He looked Wes up and down so there was no doubt about what he meant.

Wes put him on the couch, wrapped him in a blanket and then didn't join him under it.

"At least sit with me and let me put my feet in your lap."

"My lap is off limits," Wes said.

"For a guy who was this close to doing it with me the second we met, you sure are making me work for it."

"You think throwing my bad judgment in my face is going to help your cause?"

"I don't know. I'm a desperate man. I'm throwing everything and the kitchen sink at you."

While the snow rushed past the windows, the two of them sat together but too far apart for Colin's liking. The whiteout and the loud howling of the wind outside made Colin want to stay put. He fell asleep on the couch. The last thing he remembered was Wes clicking off the TV and whispering good night.

*

Before Colin came along, Wes liked to start his mornings with a workout. He had to change his routine once his gym became Colin's bedroom. Since Colin was still asleep on the couch, Wes returned to his old habit just for this morning. He was finishing up his workout,

wiping down the equipment when Colin came to the door.

"Woo hoo! Hot, hot, hot!"

"Are you ogling me?" Wes asked though Colin's visual strip search was so thorough it couldn't be missed.

"Damn right. And if you turn around, I'll ogle you some more."

Wes did turn around but only to walk away. And, yes, Colin did hoot appreciatively at seeing his ass.

After Wes came back from his shower, he found Colin standing where he had left him but with a towel around his neck and wet hair from his own shower.

"You should clear out this stuff." Colin gestured at the exercise equipment.

"You need more room?" Wes asked. "I can put at least some of it in my bedroom."

"No. But you don't need this stuff. I can be your workout. You can bench-press me and bend me over the barbell stand to fuck me."

"Only one of those is an exercise," Wes told him and headed to the kitchen.

"Right. The fucking," Colin said as he followed him.

After breakfast Colin was antsy. Wes planned to go to his office, but he had a feeling he wouldn't get any work done with Colin climbing the walls.

"The storm blew over last night. There's no reason why you can't go out and see your friends," Wes told him.

"Are you trying to get rid of me?"

"I think you need more company and more entertainment than I can provide."

"I don't need entertainment. I'm easy. As long as you feed me and give me a roof over my head, I'm yours."

"Other than a roof over your head, there isn't much else I can give you."

"You can give me that hot workout we talked about."

"Good idea. Let's go take a walk."

"You took that totally the wrong way," Colin told him. Seeing Wes put on his jacket and try to hand Colin his, he drew back. "A walk in this freezing weather?"

"It's not so bad. Are you coming?"

Colin took his jacket reluctantly.

Last night's blizzard had blanketed everything in an even covering of white. The winds exhausted themselves in the night leaving the air very still. Windless and deserted, all around them the park was as frozen as a picture. The path they took had already been marred by footprints. As they turned to head toward the Riverwalk, theirs were the first footsteps to break through the solid layer of white. The path further away was lost under the snow, but Wes followed it from memory.

"Brisk walk in the freezing weather, brilliant idea. I can't believe I'm letting you drag me out here. That's how devoted I am to you," Colin griped.

Wes found the cold and the energetic walk to keep from freezing invigorating. He needed the reminder that he was warm blooded and alive. He looked over at Colin's face, cheeks red, breath coming out in white puffs. He was the embodiment of life and heat. No wonder he complained about being dragged out into this bleak landscape where even the air was frozen. Even out here, Wes knew that if he reached under Colin's clothes, he would find so much warmth.

Dwelling on him, Wes was letting Colin's body, with all its appeal, take over his imagination. He got a clear picture of Colin's naked limbs wrapping around him. He turned away to immerse his vision in the stark landscape reduced to severe lines and only a few colors. Branches were bare, decorated with frost. Wet snow had frozen and it crunched under their feet. Nature was so still and brittle in winter. It cracked under human touch. It was hard to believe that this park was once so vibrantly green with leaves shimmering in the sun.

"You must be a Yeti if this isn't killing you," Colin said.

"How can you still be cold after all this walking?"

"I'm freezing. No one else could get me out here to traipse around for no reason. Even this can't make me not like you."

"What's to like?" Wes wondered.

"You! You're tasty and you know it. Plus you are a good guy." Because of Wes's reaction, he added, "Don't scoff. Not everyone is, you know."

"I tried to pay you for sex. I tried to take advantage of your desperation."

"You mean you failed to take advantage of my desperate need for cock," Colin told him. "And just so you know, I'll need a lot more from you to satisfy me now."

"Don't hold your breath," Wes told him.

"Because you might go crazy any minute? I was reading up on it. You might be out of the danger zone. If you didn't lose it in your teens or twenties, you're kind of, sort of in the clear."

Wes only smiled at him since it was obvious that Colin realized there was still a danger. Too bad he wasn't scared away by that. Instead of being discouraged, Colin seemed bolder since he found out about Wes. Maybe Wes should have expected that someone as young as Colin would find real obstacles unconvincing. To Colin every obstacle was a mirage, and he looked right through it and only saw the object of his desire. That's why Wes would have to keep reality firmly in his sights for both their sakes. That wasn't easy as Colin turned suddenly and stopped right in front of him.

"I just realized what you're up to. You're trying to freeze out all the sexy thoughts you're having about me. It won't work you know," Colin said and plastered himself to Wes.

Even through all the layers of clothing between them, Wes still felt the effect of being close to him. Colin took his breath away with his searching eyes that slowly stilled, with his pouting mouth, with the way his arms encircled Wes so he couldn't step away.

"Are you done? Have you made your point yet?" Wes asked him.

"What are you complaining about? We're just sharing body heat."

They were doing more than that. Colin was giving Wes a taste of what it would be like to be with him. He felt solid and strong in Wes's arms and oh, so good. Wes didn't want to let go. He was surprised when Colin did.

"Move before we turn into statues," Colin told him brusquely. Maybe he wasn't ready for what might happen either.

*

They were about to cross the street when a man in front of the

apartment building caught Colin's eye. The man paced and looked agitated. As they moved toward him, Colin tried to convince himself he was wrong. When he turned to them angrily, there was no doubt about who he was.

"Uncle Hal," Colin said. He wanted to ask him what the hell he was doing there, but he still had some small hope that this wouldn't turn ugly.

Uncle Hal looked from him to Wes with a snarl. His eyes and his face were red. Colin was sure it wasn't from the cold. God knows how much he had to drink. But the bigger question was what did he want.

"What's this? What the fuck is this?!" Uncle Hal yelled blasting Colin with his booze breath as he came barreling at him. He jabbed his finger in Wes's direction.

It was only through force of will that Colin didn't step back from him.

"This is a friend of mine and nothing to be yelling about in the street," Colin told him, keeping his voice deliberately low.

"Shut your mouth, you piece of trash. You shame this family. You shame your mother!"

Colin tried to harden himself against those words. "I'm not doing anything wrong," he said as calmly as he could.

Uncle Hal reached for him. His fingers only just grabbed hold of the front of Colin's jacket when Colin pushed them off. Being older now than when they lived with him, Colin felt more capable of dealing with his uncle, but Wes stepped in anyway.

"That's enough," Wes said. His back was to Colin. He blocked his view of Uncle Hal completely.

"Hey, Wes, not your fight," Colin said to him. His voice was low, but he was sure Wes heard him. He didn't budge though so Colin had to step to the side to get around him. Wes's arm went up protectively.

Colin could see where things stood. Wes was cold as ice and watchful. He stood between Colin and his uncle like an impenetrable wall. Muscle-bound and drunk, Uncle Hal wasn't intimidated by Wes.

Uncle Hal swung at him. Colin knew that his fist was like having a

wrecking ball coming at your head. Wes veered right as he deflected the blow with his left. Judging by his moves, he knew what he was doing.

The way the blow missed unbalanced Uncle Hal, but he recovered. He aimed his next punch at Wes's middle. It was sloppy, but Wes was too close to dodge. He turned to the side so the force of it didn't hit him fully. Immediately, he countered. With the flat of his hand, he hit Uncle Hal in the center of his chest. He lurched and slipped. Wes used that against him instantly. Twisting his arm behind his back, he smashed Uncle Hal into the building. He pressed him there with his weight. As far as Colin could tell, Wes wasn't doing any real damage to him, just restraining him. Uncle Hal's struggle was unfocused. His breathing sounded rough and unhealthy. Colin didn't think he had much fight left in him.

Once Wes felt him stop struggling, he looked at Colin. Colin nodded to Wes to let him go. Released, Uncle Hal teetered for a moment. Colin thought he might have to catch him to keep him from smashing his head open on the sidewalk. Uncle Hal coughed, leaning over like he was going to throw up. When he straightened, Colin went up to him. Out of the corner of his eyes, he saw Wes get ready to step in again.

"You have nothing to say to me. Don't ever come back here," Colin told Uncle Hal.

Uncle Hal glared at him, but then he started coughing again and staggered away.

"Way to ruin a nice walk," Colin said as he and Wes went up in the elevator.

"You hated the walk."

He didn't. Colin didn't hate any time spent with Wes. He just liked to keep him on his toes. Seeing him deal with his uncle, Colin admired how calm he had been. But now that he was watching him going into the apartment and taking his jacket off, Colin chose to admire some of his other qualities.

"So this awesome body isn't just for show," Colin praised him as his bulky jacket came off and his body was a little more visible.

"I got lucky. Your uncle would have had the better of me if he had

been sober," Wes said.

"That's never," Colin told him. "He is pretty strong. Big muscles run in the family. You should see Tim. I'm the runt of the litter." Colin looked down at himself. Next to an average guy, he looked OK, but for some reason he was always surrounded by muscly guys, big guys, or both.

"You're perfect," Wes said without thinking.

"Prove it. Grab yourself a slice of perfection," Colin challenged him.

"I meant that you are perfect in your own way," Wes said, trying to downgrade his compliment.

"But not irresistible since I am still very much unfucked."

"This is really not the best time to talk about that."

Colin did have other things on his mind. He wondered about how Uncle Hal knew where to find him and about Wes. The only people who knew where he worked and lived were his friends. None of them knew his uncle. But Brad did. He knew where Uncle Hal lived, what he was like, and that he had it in for Colin. If Brad saw Colin leave work and go home with Wes, he might have been the one who told him. Now Colin had to worry about what either one of them might tell Tim.

Chapter 10

That morning, Wes had glimpsed Colin walking groggily to the bathroom. He had only seen enough to notice that those weren't his usual sweats and to memorize how the fabric showed off the curve of his ass. When Colin came to the kitchen, Wes got a better look. The way the pajama bottoms clung to him, he might as well have been naked. Wes took too long to look away. Now he could feel his dick reacting to the sight. Of course there was no chance that Colin wasn't aware of what he was doing to him. One look at his eyes would confirm it, but Wes refused to look back in his direction.

"My eyes are up here," Colin said, admitting his guilt.

"I'm not looking at any part of you," Wes told him and busied himself with toast.

"Not looking at me so deliberately is as good as eating me up with your eyes."

"It's not even close," Wes said. He wished he could get his fill of looking at Colin, but looking at him for even a second longer would have cost him all of his self-control. Colin would be naked on the floor under him not standing there gloating.

Mercifully, after breakfast Colin went to his room to change, and Wes went to tend to his hard-on.

What happened that morning, and the constant frisson he felt whenever he was near Colin, told Wes that something might happen no matter how hard he resisted. Being around Colin was dangerous. But there was no relief even when Colin went to work. He haunted Wes just as much when he was gone, maybe more since he wasn't as much on his guard against a ghost.

When Wes was alone in the apartment, traces of Colin's scent made him shudder. Colin's eyes smiled at him. His mouth was soft on Wes's lips then dragged down his body, lower and lower. Wasn't this insanity, to see and smell and hear someone who wasn't there, to feel his mouth wrapping tightly around his cock? Wes had invited sweet chaos into his life and now he was drowning in it. His carefully ordered existence was blown apart.

To try and clear his head of Colin, Wes went for a walk. But wherever he went, he couldn't escape him. Wes's stride was long and determined. Frozen puddles cracked under his heavy feet. Cold air was stabbing at his lungs as he walked fast and breathed hard. Icy winds were solid as they hit back, chilling his face into a mask of numbness, making his chest ache with every breath he took. As he rushed nowhere, he felt disengaged from every sensation in his body. All his efforts were given over to trying to escape his attraction to a vulnerable young man who was too young for him.

Dogged and unyielding, Colin was pulling Wes in, and Wes was getting closer to giving in all the time. He could feel himself standing on the edge of the cliff and falling. All these years he tried to stay on solid ground, but finally the truth was exposed that his fate was never in his hands. Colin just had to show up in his life with his freewheeling ways and his irrational optimism, and Wes was lost. Why even fight it? He had to fight it for Colin's sake. Even if he was willing to give up on saving himself, he couldn't let Colin fall with him.

Wes went home with some fresh resolve. Sitting at his computer in his office, he lost himself in his work for hours. Then as soon as he heard Colin come through the door, Wes felt his heart start to beat faster. There was no hope that Colin wouldn't come into his office. Wes could feel him right behind him as he tried to sneak in. Then he felt his ice cold fingers as Colin slipped just his fingertips down the back of his collar. Wes barely flinched. Holding his breath, he waited for the fleeting sensation to pass. He felt singed by cold skin and the burning warmth underneath.

"What are you made of? My fingers are like ice," Colin said as he pulled his hand back.

"You have gloves. Please wear them. If you don't like them, I'll get you others," Wes told him, trying to focus on something practical and not the turmoil inside him.

"I was texting. But I like your motherly concern."

Wes sighed and turned back to his work. As he tried to concentrate, he could feel Colin's expectant eyes on him. He had noticed Wes's surly mood, but instead of leaving him alone, he waited. Why did he

have to make this so hard? As if the tension in Wes acted like a magnet, Colin just wouldn't leave him alone.

Feeling Colin's hands on him again, he tensed. Colin's skin was already warmer. His touch was just as startling but softer and somehow more demanding. The contact burned him up inside, and Wes pushed away his hand as gently and firmly as he could.

As Wes gave him a stern, warning glare, the seductive look on Colin's face turned sulky. He still looked too good to ignore.

"I can see you're bored, but find something to do somewhere else. I have work to finish." Wes did his best to keep his voice cold while his insides were on fire. He stayed stone-faced as Colin started to seethe.

"You know what this is about, and it's not boredom," Colin said, trying to sound reasonable, but then he snapped. "This impassive shit is pissing me off!" He paced around the room and took a few deep breaths. "Sorry. I guess you have the right not to want me."

"You guess?" Wes said acidly.

Colin turned and frowned at his tone. "Fine. You don't have the right not to want me when I want you so much. Happy?" he said, being deliberately unreasonable now. Then he took it a step further.

Coming closer, he grabbed Wes's face with one hand. With his other hand, he gripped the back if Wes's chair to brace himself and to keep Wes from moving back. Wes only had time to open his mouth with Colin's name halfway to his lips. Colin's mouth was on his, hard and hot. The kiss was lightning fast and bruising, as jarring as an electric shock. The rough kiss didn't last long. It was harsh and angry, but it tasted of Colin, and that was all Wes needed to send him clear out of his mind.

Wes regrouped quickly but only enough to put on a mask. Acting like nothing had happened, inside, he reeled while his heart pounded a loud drumbeat in his ears.

"Don't pretend nothing happened, you cold-blooded bastard," Colin said. He was breathless and still mad.

"A lot less happened than you think," Wes said as he tried to get his own breathing to even out.

"Ouch!" Colin doubled over, pretending to be mortally wounded. "I'm gonna go stroke one off, you think about that," he said, but he

didn't move. "It should be you making me come, you withholding son of a bitch."

"If you want to prove you can handle what you're asking for, you might want to stop whining like a child and let me work," Wes snapped at him and turned away to stare blankly at his computer screen. He needed Colin to leave so he could get himself under control.

"Fuck you, Wes," Colin said, but a few seconds later Wes felt Colin hugging him. He had put his arms around Wes from behind and pressed his face against Wes's head. There was no demand in his embrace, only tenderness.

"What's this about?" Wes asked. He looked up at Colin as he let go.

Colin's eyes were gleaming, almost tearful, as he said, "You're a good guy."

"I'm not," Wes told him.

Colin shook his head. "Here I am attacking you, bugging you while you work, yelling and cursing at you, and not worrying for one minute that you'll throw my sorry ass out on the street. I should be scared out of my wits, but I'm not. That's how good a guy you are."

"Gratitude makes me uncomfortable," Wes said as he squirmed under that soft-eyed gaze.

"Sorry. I'll turn back into an ungrateful bitch any minute now."

"Good. Now get out of here and let me work," Wes told him, trying for a stern tone but missing the mark and smiling too. How could he resist him when he was being so crazy one minute and so sweet the next? Watching Colin leave, giving Wes one last, longing look, he wanted him more than ever.

Well, that was a complete failure. Wes couldn't help but notice that the harder he tried to push him away, the harder Colin pushed back. Defeat wasn't in his nature. Despite not making any headway, Wes was glad that they had sort of made up. He wanted Colin to understand that it was for the best but not to feel alienated or alone. Wes knew all too well how that felt.

To ease his mind, Wes went to the living room. Colin was there watching *The Human Centipede*, and by the sound of the comments

he made to the screen, not for the first time. Wes never had the stomach for horror movies. To him they were an echo of the dormant insanity inside him. When he had watched them in college, mostly with Pete and his other friends, he always felt that they pricked at the lunatic genes he carried. Being more mature, he wasn't going to force himself to watch them for Colin's sake.

Because of what happened earlier, Wes wanted to sit with him. He didn't feel they made up fully until they spent some time together. While listening for the movie to end, Wes went and made them a late night snack.

When he heard Colin changing channels frantically, he knew the movie was over, and it was safe for him to go to the living room.

"Are you busy?" Wes asked as he set down two sandwiches. That made it clear that he wanted to join him.

Colin smiled up at him. "I'm doing two of my favorite things – texting and flipping channels. My number one favorite thing is bothering you."

"I'm sorry I snapped at you," Wes said and sat down on the couch with him.

"No worries. I was out of line. I shouldn't have pushed you or tested you or whatever. I don't need to prove anything. I already know you can't resist me," Colin claimed then he took a big bite of his sandwich.

"I've been resisting you for weeks," Wes pointed out.

Colin had to finish chewing then he said, "I haven't made a serious move yet. Don't you underestimate me." Colin put on a challenging look and asked, "If I'm not irresistible, then why am I here?"

"I get lonely," Wes stated simply.

"I get lonely too, you know." Colin leaned in a little to make it clear he meant a different kind of loneliness.

"And I'm supposed to help you with that?" Wes guessed.

"You've done so much for me already. You feed me, give me a place to stay, but I have other needs. I'm horny all the time, and it's your fault."

"Oh?"

"You're walking around here, hiding that body in those baggy clothes. I just want to tear you open like a Christmas gift." Seeing

his look, Colin said, "I mean open you gently like a precious and fragile, crystal figurine or something."

"Just stay on your side of the couch," Wes told him.

"You can't fool me. That testiness earlier tells me that you're about to crack. You're at you sexual breaking point. You won't be able to resist me for much longer."

That was more astute of Colin than Wes would have liked.

"Don't worry, I'm not going to use my youth and energy against you and attack you relentlessly. I'll just wait you out."

"I'm won over already," Wes said sarcastically. He doubted Colin had the patience for that strategy. But the way Wes's defenses were crumbling, he might not need it.

Chapter 11

For a while, Colin made no further forays but continued his siege. He pretended to act casual, but with every one of his looks he was staking a claim. He was reminding Wes that he belonged to him. Even when Colin did nothing to try and win him over, his grip on Wes was always getting stronger. There was something disarming about Colin's constancy. Wes found it impossible not to believe in him.

That night Colin came in with more energy than usual.

"Going clubbing! Lau and Tyson are taking me. I know you don't want me out there grinding against strangers so you better come along," Colin told him. He looked at Wes eagerly, as if he thought he might actually go.

It took a while for Colin to believe that Wes couldn't be guilted, begged or threatened into going to a club. He left disappointed as Wes wished him a good time.

It was a lie of course. Wes was afraid of what might happen when Colin found himself among other young, sweating, male bodies. In Wes's mind, any one of those men was a better choice than he was. But that didn't keep him from wanting to shout for them to keep their fucking hands off. He didn't want another man to so much as brush up against Colin. The thought that Colin might do a lot more than dance too close to other men twisted him up inside. He tried to remind himself futilely that Colin had every right to do as he liked. Wes had rejected him and given him that right. It didn't work. Waiting for Colin to come home was pure torture.

Colin came back from clubbing sweaty and still frenetic, like he had absorbed the atmosphere of the club and brought it home with him. He shrugged out of his jacket and missed the hook when he tried to hang it up. His jacket lay crumpled on the floor. Colin ignored it and came toward Wes.

Standing in the living room, Wes was mesmerized by his approach. He stood still even when Colin plastered himself against him.

Clinging to Wes, he breathed a warm, boozy breath in his ear. His cheek was cold and clammy, his beard both scratchy and soft against Wes's neck. His body exuded heat and sex. Wes got scared that he had fucked or sucked, but his cock was hard as a rock. As he pressed himself into Wes, Colin's need was so blatant and strong. He hadn't done anything that satisfied him. Colin's eyes burrowed into him like he wanted to screw himself to Wes with that look. Wes was quickly reaching the limit of his self control.

Colin was so close. Wes couldn't breathe. His lips brushed Wes's cheek then moved to his mouth. Wes turned his head to accept the kiss and lost all sense of himself. Colin's mouth was soft and open against his. His tongue licked Wes's lower lip. Then Colin pulled back and smiled. His eyes were still glued to Wes's mouth. They were both dazed. Slowly Colin's drunk and dreamy eyes moved up to look into Wes's.

"I compared every guy in there to you, and they all sucked," Colin said.

"You're not old enough to drink," Wes reminded him pointlessly.

"I sneaked a few. Want to dance with me, and by that I mean do you want me to sweat all over you and grind against you." Colin was already doing that, making him hard.

"I want you to go to bed," Wes told him. He barely managed an even tone.

"Your bed?" Colin said hopefully. He pushed up harder against Wes and breathed shakily. He opened his mouth and rose for another kiss. Wes wanted to deny him, but he allowed their lips to touch and their tongues to glide against each other but for only a moment before he pulled away. Colin closed his eyes and let out an ecstatic moan. When he opened his eyes again, they were on fire.

"I'm such a handful tonight. Want to feel?"

"I can feel plenty," Wes told him in a thick voice that betrayed his extreme arousal. Colin's cock was prominent, arching into him, swiping against Wes's erection. All of Wes's attention was centered on its hardness, its insistent pressure, but he still somehow managed to maneuver Colin into his own bed.

"Don't just put me to bed. Sit with me," Colin said as Wes covered him though he was still in his clothes.

He held Wes's hand so gently that Wes found it impossible to pull away. Wes would have found it easier to calm down away from him, but he didn't want to leave him until he was asleep.

"OK. Tell me about your night," Wes said as he sat on the edge of his bed, Colin's hand held in both of his.

"It was fun but lonely," Colin told him with a smile.

"A nightclub was lonely?"

"I missed you. Wherever I am, whatever I'm doing, I always wish you were there," Colin said, his voice cracking.

"I'm sorry I couldn't go. I wish I was there to watch you having fun," Wes admitted.

"Next time you have to come, and I'll dance for you," Colin said. His eyes closed on those words and he was asleep instantly.

Wes kept staring at him, and he felt like his heart would burst. He realized he was still holding his hand and he kissed it.

Wes let go of his hand and left Colin's room reluctantly. As he went to bed, his eyes closed on darkness, and his mind gave itself over to vivid images of Colin. His body replayed the sensation of Colin pressed against him. Images and sensations weren't enough. Wes craved the warmth of his body. Colin was so bright and hot, he burned right through his defenses, waking up his frozen heart. Wes wished that all his fears would just fly away into the night so he could throw himself into being with Colin even if it was for just a little while.

Wes felt like his whole life had been lived inside some lonely night. Now Colin filled his life, he made the sun shine on him. He was sure that Colin could make him happy, but Wes didn't want to use him just to fill the deep well of emptiness inside him. Colin deserved better. But Wes didn't know if he could protect the one he loved from himself?

*

Colin spent the next morning suffering through his well-earned hangover. Sometimes he emitted a low moan. As he sipped black coffee while leaning next to the living room windows, he watched a bird fly by. With its white feathers, it almost disappeared against the

clouds. Birds looked so lonely in winter when so many of them had flown far away.

All in all, Colin felt pretty cheerful considering how miserable his head was. What happened last night and every feeling inside him confirmed that he belonged with Wes. Hours in the company of hot, sweaty guys gyrating to a pounding beat wasn't as good as waking up every day knowing he would see Wes. It was guaranteed happiness.

Maybe that's what all those crazy married people were after. They wanted to lock down that good feeling. Colin was actually understanding the idea of marriage. What's next, he'd get why people wanted to live in suburbs? He might laugh at himself for it, but the way he felt about Wes, he'd lock him down in a second if he saw the chance.

And there was Wes, looking at him cautiously like he knew about Colin's long term plans for him. Or maybe he was just afraid of another ruthless come-on. Colin tried to dredge up some remorse for the way he had been acting lately, but none would come.

"If I did jump you, what would be so bad about it?" Colin asked as Wes kept a safe distance.

"I'm thinking of your age and my future," Wes told him. "I'm trying to protect you, or maybe both of us."

"Stop trying to protect either one of us, you control freak. This is meant to be," Colin practically yelled at him. His head told him to keep his voice down. "Sooner or later you are going to succumb to my manly charms. Stop wasting my precious youth, love me and fuck everything else."

"Love?" Wes said like he couldn't believe Colin would use that word.

"You know it's what I'm after. That's why you're so afraid of me. I fell insanely in love with you, and you're afraid of catching it. I'm hoping it's too late, and you can't live without me. As soon as I feel better, I'll make you give me that big, gorgeous body of yours. Then I'll take all your love. That should hold me for a while."

Wes frowned at his plan of attack. "And if I never come to terms with it? If I can't give you what you want?" Wes said with a sad look in his eyes.

"Stop thinking and deciding and just trust me. I know what's best. Now rub my temples. My head is killing me."

"Please don't get your heart broken," Wes begged him. He came closer and made Colin sit down.

"By you? Never," Colin mumbled as Wes did some kind of magic with his fingertips and made all the pain in the world disappear.

Chapter 12

Wes hoped that Colin had plans for his day off since he had been so unmanageable lately, but no such luck. While Wes hinted that Colin should go see his friends or a movie, he wouldn't budge unless he could drag Wes with him.

"Don't you want to take me somewhere, like to bed?" Colin said.

"How about to lunch?" Wes offered. He figured Colin would be less trouble in a public place. He was wrong about that. Even out of the apartment, Wes was under siege.

The day was cold with snow that fell now and then but didn't last. Wes spent the whole walk trying to keep Colin from walking arm in arm with him. If he was being truthful with himself, he wished he didn't have to, but Colin already had too many wrong ideas. Wes couldn't let him see how good he made him feel. Colin hardly even noticed that small rejection.

Wes wasn't sure he had it in him to discourage him hard enough to make an impression. At his age, Colin should lose interest in him pretty soon. Until then, Wes would just keep the pain he caused both of them to a minimum.

Wes decided on a Spanish restaurant that had tapas on its lunch menu. He figured the variety might keep Colin occupied.

"Just so you know, this only satisfies one of my appetites," Colin said as he picked out yet another bite of food to taste. "We better go for a long walk after this. I want to work off all these goodies so you won't be able to resist me the next time I throw myself at you." Colin was talking while chewing, but Wes couldn't pretend he didn't understand every word.

"I have more willpower than you think, and you don't know what you're getting into. You're too young..."

Colin cut off his lecture. "How old do I need to be to know that I want to spend the rest of my life in your arms?" Colin said. He placed his hand on Wes's forearm. When Wes pulled back from his grip, he pretended not to notice. "I'm going to be nineteen soon, and I see a future where you eat your words while we live happily ever after."

"I don't see that future," Wes told him bluntly.

Colin just fumed for a minute. "You're going to make me lose hope in men, and love, and everything that's good in life."

"For God's sake," Wes said, protesting his guilt trip.

"You told me I wasn't old enough. That's as good as telling me that when I'm older, this will happen."

"It wasn't a promise."

"Yes, it was, and I'm holding you to it." Colin was furious and determined. "I'm willing to wait, but I am not willing to give up. I'm not living my life without you. It's not happening. When I'm nineteen next week..."

"You'll still be the same person. You won't have any more experience than you do now," Wes pointed out.

Colin didn't take it well. He pushed away his food and glared. Every second, he was getting angrier with Wes.

"That's great. That's awesome. Piss away your chance to be happy. Fuck you! Experience? That's what you want? Fine," Colin said and stood up.

Wes didn't like the sound of that or the look in Colin's eyes. "What are you doing?"

"None of your business. I know where we stand now. Isn't that what matters?" he said and stormed out of the restaurant.

Wes was delayed by surprise and then by having to pay the bill. By the time he got out onto the sidewalk, he saw no sign of Colin. Without knowing which way he went, Wes randomly searched up and down the street. He couldn't find him. When he called his phone and texted him, there was no answer. Not sure what he had set in motion or how to fix it, Wes went home to wait for him.

*

His walk was fueled by blind anger and disappointment, but at every step Colin tried to convince himself that Wes didn't mean it. Colin stopped when he saw that he had reached the edge of the park. He looked up past the first of the bare branches that now made the park a sad place to visit. The sky was a perfectly even covering of gray. It was hard to believe those were really clouds. It looked more

like the sky itself had turned gray and might stay that way forever.

As far as Colin was concerned, that was Wes up there. Like a frozen sky, Wes was pale, perfectly still, and unreachable. Colin punched upwards. Maybe he couldn't crack that sky, but Wes's heart was a different matter. His heart wasn't the sky. It was like those bare trees or like so many other living things in winter. His heart was lying dormant, waiting for warm days, for the sun to shine on it. Then why couldn't Colin bring him back to life? What if he wasn't the one Wes needed? The thought hurt him inside. He couldn't face it.

He ran through the park, sometimes slipping on ice or tripping over obstacles hidden by snow. When he no longer knew where he was, he stopped. He was deep inside the park where it was shadowy and deserted. As he breathed hard, cold air tasted metallic in his lungs, like breathing icicles and tasting blood. It had started snowing. Colin watched the snowflakes right above as they spiral down to him. He caught them on his tongue. Further on, the wind spun the flakes into a snowy whirlwind. That's when Colin noticed a man with his hands deep in the pockets of his big overcoat. He was hovering, not sure if Colin was someone he should approach. So Colin had come to the right place after all. Right through the trees, he could see the sign for Oasis Lounge. He could have his pick of some of the guys in there if this one didn't work out.

Passing up the lurking guy, Colin went to Oasis. It was too early for the place to be packed. There were maybe a dozen guys in there. It was warm, but Colin took off his jacket reluctantly. He felt exposed though he still had a few layers on. A tall, severely blond guy in his late twenties reminded him of Wes, but his eyes looked cruel and his mouth was like a slit. Leaning on the edge of the bar, he arrogantly signaled to Colin to approach him. Another guy smiled at him. He was good-looking, not as tall, but not as mean-looking either. Colin went up to him. He had a cool Spanish accent, and he didn't rush Colin. That was nice, but Colin wanted to get this over with.

Even while he went through the motions, Colin wanted to forget every minute. Why wasn't Wes here to pull him away from this man and take him home, tell him what a fool he was being? Why the hell

did he need Wes to tell him that? He already knew. He felt it in every inch of his being as his body recoiled from this man's touch, and from the next one, from all of them. The whole time, inside his head, he was screaming at Wes, "Where are you?!"

Night was falling by the time Colin headed home. His limbs felt heavy, his head hurt like his skull was screwed on too tight. He approached the apartment with the fear that he would find it dark and empty.

It wasn't empty. Wes was home. As he stumbled in, Colin caught him pacing the living room. Wes stopped and stared at Colin hard, as if he was trying to answer some question about him without having to ask.

Colin stepped toward him, but half the room was still between them. "Do you want to smell me? See what I've been up to?" When Wes didn't take him up on it, Colin sniffed the front of his own sweater. "I smell like smoke, and like booze with a few different colognes and aftershaves mixed in, some BO that isn't mine."

"Stop!" Wes said though Colin wasn't going to go on.

Instead of answering the question Wes didn't want to ask him, Colin had a question of his own. "Why do I have to go out there trolling for guys to get more experience just so you won't reject me?"

"You don't. Are you OK?" Wes asked urgently. He came up to Colin and looked at him closely.

Without answering, Colin leaned against him, resting his head on his shoulder.

"Are you OK?" Wes asked again, this time in a soft voice as he put his arms around Colin lightly.

"I will be," Colin told him. He didn't expect to sound so croaky and pathetic.

Wes's hold on him tightened. It felt so good.

"Now I'm all right," Colin told him. Every second in Wes's arms made the whole evening disappear. There was only Wes and his strong arms holding him. This was how it was supposed to be. Wes would figure that out too, sooner would be better than later. For now he wanted to put Wes's mind at ease. He stepped back a little so he

could make eye contact.

"I couldn't do it. One or two guys were pretty hot too. But I kept seeing you, and it hurt to even think of doing it with them. I just don't want to be with anyone else," Colin said and threw himself into Wes's arms again. He spoke leaning against Wes's chest. "After that I thought it might be easier if the guy wasn't hot. Maybe then it wouldn't feel so much like cheating. But it was still too hard. There was this older guy. I thought he would count for a million years of experience. He kind of got aggressive so I had to get the hell away from him." Colin could feel Wes tense.

His breathing got ragged as he pulled back to look at Colin with alarm.

"He didn't do anything much," Colin reassured him.

"I'm sorry."

"It's not on you. I know it was my choice. If it's what I have to do, I'll get up the courage again and do it. But do you really want me out there doing it with random guys?"

"No!" Wes said without hesitation. Colin could see how much the thought hurt him.

"Then stop pushing me away. I committed myself to you. Now I can't turn it off and go fuck just anyone. Why can't you do that for me?"

"Why do you have to be so young?" Wes asked hopelessly.

"Why do I need to be older or have more experience? Why do I need anything when all I want is you?" Colin said, his voice breaking.

"I'm not worth having. I'm not worth any of this."

"Give yourself to me and let me decide what you're worth!" Colin's demand was followed by a violent lunge that slammed Wes into the wall.

*

It was nighttime when Colin came back to him pale, bedraggled, with a heartbreaking look on his face. Seeing him like that, Wes was afraid of what he might have done, what Wes might have pushed him into. He was relieved when Colin told him that nothing

happened then shocked as he slammed into him.

The impact of his back hitting the wall knocked the air out of him. As Colin crashed against him, Wes caught him in his arms. Colin's eyes were wild. His cock was hard. His hands grabbed at Wes madly. It was like Colin wanted to tear him apart.

The unyielding press of his body was nothing compared to Colin's steel-willed desire. When he laid claim to Wes's mouth, his kiss was full of anger and desperation. The raw, sloppy kiss didn't last. Wes pushed Colin away before his self-control was completely undone.

The wet, hard feel of Colin's mouth nearly consumed him anyway. Wes wanted to feel Colin's body under him, to thread his fingers through his hair. His heart thundered in his ears. Colin had never been closer or more within reach. All he had to do was answer Colin's yearning with his honest feelings, but he didn't dare.

Colin was panting and glaring at him. His jacket was half off his shoulders, and he pulled it off impatiently. He threw it behind him, aiming for the couch, but clearly not caring where it landed.

"Between the two of us, I can't believe you're the fucking coward," Colin accused him. He touched his fingers to his lips like he might have hurt himself when he kissed Wes so hard. He spoke in a husky voice. "I'm ready to do anything for you, for us. Stop driving me to this, stop bruising my ego and hurting me in general."

"I never want to hurt you." It was simply a statement of truth. Everything he did was so Colin wouldn't be hurt by him.

"Too damn late," Colin said. It was clear from the look in his eyes that he didn't want to say that.

"I'm sorry."

"Yeah, we're both sorry. It doesn't get us anywhere."

"I don't expect you to share my fear for the future and for my sanity but..."

"Why not? I want to share everything with you. You big, blond idiot."

Wes hung his head. He didn't know what to say to him that would dissuade him. Instead, he asked him if he wanted dinner, offered to make him something or order whatever he wanted. Colin looked glum and went to his room.

Wes was just glad he was home. Seeing that Colin's jacket was in

danger of sliding off the couch, he picked it up. Once it was in his hands, he couldn't help it, he held it against him. As he smelled the alien smells mixed with Colin's familiar scent, Wes wondered how close had he come to doing something.

*

Colin went to bed mad and horny. He had stripped down to his boxers, strewing his clothes all over the floor. He was tired but it was too early and he was too restless to sleep. Too many sensations and flashes of memory swirled in his brain. Wes was the worst of them. When Colin kissed him, Wes didn't look surprised, but he did look a little mad. Well Colin could see his mad and raise him. Then Wes's face went blank, kind of lost. Colin couldn't read him.

As his anger drained away, Colin mainly felt relieved that he didn't come home with any more experience than he left with. That wasn't the way to get Wes anyway. Colin just had to learn some patience, maybe fake some maturity.

Though he was tempted to go and make up with Wes, Colin decided to leave it until morning. Still keyed up, he might launch himself at Wes again. That wasn't the way to Wes's heart. Colin didn't want to smash it open. He wanted to melt it.

*

Early the next morning, as Wes was making coffee, he didn't know what to expect when Colin got up. But Colin came to him unexpectedly contrite.

"I'm sorry about last night. I didn't mean to blackmail you," he said. He seemed genuinely remorseful.

"You didn't," Wes told him. The last thing he wanted was to make Colin feel bad.

"Yes, I did. I know you care about me, and I used that against you. I tried to make you feel guilty. Sorry." Colin looked gloomy, and his eyes pleaded for Wes's forgiveness.

"Please don't apologize," Wes begged him. He was unprepared for how much it hurt him to hear Colin blaming himself.

Colin got a questioning look in his eyes then they shone reflecting the tentative smile on his lips. He said a quiet "OK" and hugged Wes. It was a chaste hug, tight and heartfelt. It was over before Wes got a chance to return it. He breathed hard and saw that Colin now looked more cheerful. Looking into Wes's eyes with something like his usual bright, insinuating expression, Colin told him his decision.

"I'm going to wait for you, but not patiently. And I'm not going to try and rack up any experience points in the meantime."

"If I say I'm glad, will you take it the wrong way?" Wes asked.

"Yes."

Wes smiled at him. In his whole life he hadn't smiled as much as he had since he met Colin. "You don't know how wonderful you are," Wes told him in a tight voice.

"That's my line. I know I'm awesome. You're the one who is all down on himself." Colin looked at him with his old spirit shining from his eyes.

"If you knew it, you wouldn't try to throw yourself away on someone like me," Wes told him.

"I was going to get mad at you for being so down on yourself, but it's actually a sign that we're perfect for each other. I have too much confidence. You have none. Between us we're just right."

But Wes knew Colin had more bravado than confidence. What happened yesterday proved that to him.

"I have all this faith in you," Colin said as he gazed at him. "I think it's more than enough for both of us."

"I don't deserve it."

"Oh, you do, and one day soon, you'll earn it too. You are going to make all my dreams come true," Colin said with a big grin and all that crazy, unfounded faith shining in his eyes.

How could Wes even think of killing that in him? He couldn't deny that he loved the feeling that Colin was his, only his. Even if there were others before, from now on, it would be only him. All Wes had to do was give in. He was lost in that thought, the feeling of possession. He wasn't fully conscious of what he was doing with his hands on Colin.

Wes's gaze was lost in him. His fingertips grazed the stubble on Colin's cheek as his thumb brushed from one corner of his mouth to

the other. Colin kept his mouth closed. He didn't want to be too helpful or cooperative just then. Wes could see a perverse defiance in his eyes. He couldn't tell if that look was meant to seduce him or not. When Colin didn't respond, Wes started to pull his hand back, thinking it was for the best. Colin grabbed his hand and kissed his fingertips. It was as if he wasn't capable of rejecting Wes.

At the touch of his lips, Wes's need for Colin completely shattered his willpower, and he leaned in. He watched Colin smile right before he kissed him. The slide of his mouth was overwhelming. The probing of his tongue set a fire inside him. Wes was lost, drowned, beyond rescue.

When Wes pulled back, ready to apologize, Colin hugged him.

"God, you make me happy," he gasped as he held Wes too tightly.

That stopped all the words Wes wanted to say. He closed his eyes and breathed in Colin's scent. Maybe he was happy too.

It took a long time for his breathing to even out. It was like Colin's mouth was still on him, stealing his breath. Colin felt so solid and right in his arms, not like someone he had to protect, but strong, maybe even stronger than him.

Colin stopped hugging him so he could give him a triumphant look, which wasn't eager or gloating but almost serene in victory. "That was a real kiss. I figured I would have to seduce you while you were drunk or something," Colin said.

"I wouldn't want that. I want to go into this with my eyes open or not at all." It was a sort of warning, probably too late, and like all others, useless.

"Fine then. With your eyes open it is," Colin said, a hopeful look on his face. Seeing how Wes was a crumbling mess in his defeat, Colin smiled at him reassuringly. "Since you're being so good, I'm going to try and calm down. But you have to start coming to terms with the inevitable. You're mine."

Wes had escaped to his office, consumed by Colin in a new way. He was so unreasonable and loving, but he wasn't all impulse. He wasn't thoughtless. He waited for Wes with his own version of patience one minute and furious impatience the next. Every second Wes had loved him more.

But Colin deserved better than what he asked for – an emotionally stunted man who was too old for him. The more wonderful Colin was the less Wes deserved him, the more he wanted to protect him, the more he wanted for him a better life than he could give him. And then there he was, kissing him. He couldn't blame this one on Colin. He couldn't take it back. He could only wonder where this would take them.

After decades of existence, Wes was finally being brought to life with all its pains and joys and more fear than he ever felt when he only had himself to think of.

Knowing that Colin would be going to work soon, Wes got antsy. He had to stop working so he could see him before he left. Colin must have gotten ready in a hurry. Wes wanted to scold him for going out with hair still damp from the shower. He watched him straighten his sweater. Before he put on his jacket, Colin reached down and adjusted the crotch of his jeans. Noticing Wes watching him, he turned to him fully.

"Did you catch all that?" Colin taunted him. "You didn't miss any of the good stuff, did you? Here it goes again. Watch closely now."

Colin made a show of adjusting himself, tugging his balls into place as his cock grew in his hand visibly. Once he was done, he stood there with the front of his jeans bulging while Wes refused to avert his eyes.

"Do you even know the meaning of embarrassment?" Wes asked him.

"What do I have to be embarrassed about?" Colin said with a confident smirk. Wes had to smile at him as he sauntered out. Whatever his better qualities might be, he certainly wasn't a picture of maturity.

Chapter 13

The night before his nineteenth birthday, Colin got off work early and his friends took him out to celebrate. He had told them that he was reserving the night of his birthday for Wes. They were not kind and understanding about that at all. Every one of them accused him of planning some perverted sex act for the occasion. Any sex act would work for him, but they let their imaginations run wild. By the time he got home, his head was spinning and he felt a little queasy. After telling Wes that his friends were kinky freaks and showing off all his loot, he went straight to bed. His real birthday was tomorrow and he couldn't wait to spend it with Wes.

Next day at work, Colin was a worse klutz than ever. Thankfully no one was hurt as Colin stumbled around in a daze of uncertainty and anticipation. One thing was for sure, one of his gifts tonight better be Wes himself or there would be hell to pay.

On the night of his birthday, things were off to a good start. Wes had made dinner, ordered a huge cake that was a challenge even to Colin's appetite. Best of all, Wes had this great, nervous smile on his face.

Over dinner, Colin told him about his phone call from Tim.

"It was a special occasion so it wasn't ninety percent bitching and nagging. He was more like the Tim he used to be before Mom died. He told me about stuff he was doing up there and some of the people. It was really nice. It almost made up for the gift card he sent me with a birthday card that said to buy myself some warm boots and socks. If your own brother doesn't get you something cool, who will?" Colin looked at Wes pointedly.

"I guess it's a good thing I didn't get you gift card," Wes said and went to get the cake and set it in front of Colin.

When the candles with the numbers one and nine were blown out, Wes gave Colin his first gift. Unrolling it on the dining table, Colin cracked up. It was a Nosferatu movie poster.

"How did you know I had a thing for this guy?" Colin said and

stood up to hug him. He was already considering where he would put it up.

"What's this?" Colin asked as Wes handed him a second gift.

"A new phone. It comes with a generous data plan," Wes said.

Colin pulled it out of the gift bag, not believing his eyes. For a moment he only gaped at Wes. When he got his voice back, he said, "That's a boyfriend gift, and you know it."

"It's a practical gift. That's all," Wes told him. He knew that Colin had the cheapest phone with the cheapest plan that allowed calls and texting but no data.

"Aha. It's a boyfriend gift," Colin insisted as he checked out what his new phone could do. He set it aside sooner than he wanted to and said a heartfelt "Thank you." Then he added, "For my boyfriend gift."

Wes only sighed. He turned to the cake and started cutting them each a slice.

"Cut me a big slice. That's what a good boyfriend does," Colin said as he sat down again at the table.

"Maybe I just want to keep your mouth occupied."

"There are better ways to do that."

"Happy birthday," Wes told him as he handed him a giant slice of cake.

Colin scarfed it down in record time. The whole time he kept Wes in his sights. He had plans for him.

"I'm sorry you're having such a lonely birthday," Wes told him.

"It's not lonely. You went all out for me. My heart is happy. Thank you," Colin told him.

"I wish I could give you everything," Wes said quietly.

"You know what I want. It's my birthday. Just remember how much I love you and how bad and impatient I've been."

"Want more cake?" Wes asked.

"Is it really impossible to take me seriously?"

"I take you seriously."

"When? You think I'm kidding around, but I'm deadly serious about you."

"No one is doubting your sincerity. We're just not right for each other." Wes stood up and moved into the living room.

Colin followed him. "The fuck we're not! If there was anyone else in the picture, I would think I wasn't good enough for you, I'm a loser with a sucky job..."

"Colin," Wes objected to his self-description.

"Those are just the facts. The good news is I have no competition, and that makes me look pretty damn good. In this corner we have me. In that corner, nobody. I'm running unopposed, I can't lose. Sooner or later you'll be all mine. But if a hot doctor or firefighter enters the picture, I'm screwed and not in a good way."

Wes wasn't convinced so Colin took both of his hands in his. "What's your biggest regret in life?"

Wes looked like he was thinking about it. Colin thought he might say that it was offering him money or maybe something else Colin didn't know about. Wes said, "I'm not sure I have any."

"I guarantee you, you will," Colin announced. "This. This right here and now will be your greatest regret in life."

Wes only stared at Colin. He didn't deny it. maybe he didn't regret propositioning him because it brought them together. Colin certainly didn't regret saying yes to him. If everything up till now led him to Wes, and anything took Colin away from him, the rest of his life would be lived in sadness and regret. Colin knew that without a doubt. The look in Wes's eyes told him he knew it too.

"There are so many better guys," Wes told him, still fighting him.

"It's you or no one. The best guy in the world can't compare to the one stupid guy I can't live without."

"Don't exaggerate."

"Don't dismiss me," Colin told him. He got very serious as he looked at Wes.

Wes squeezed his hands and spoke in a thick voice. "I'm not. I can't dismiss you. You're too important to me. Your every word and thought and breath matter to me more than anything."

The words stunned Colin. The air was knocked out of him. When Wes poured his heart out, he did it with a vengeance. For a moment Colin was in awe of how much he held inside while Colin spilled his guts all over the place.

"But I'm not allowed to feel the same way?" Colin said when he finally got his breath back and he wasn't too choked up to speak.

"What do you mean allowed? I can't stop you from being you."

"Damn right. You can't stop me from loving you."

For a moment, Wes only looked at him then he leaned in. "What can I give you?"

"You. And I don't need gift wrapping or warnings or promises of a perfect life. Just give me you." Colin knew he was extorting one more gift from him but he didn't care. He hooked one arm behind his neck and kissed Wes softly, begging, pleading, threatening him, all with that kiss. Pulling back for only a second so he could look at him, he dived in again, kissing Wes harder and deeper than he ever had before.

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Feeling Colin's body hot and hard against him, Wes was helpless. He wanted Colin too much not to kiss him back. Wes wrapped him in his arms and kissed him as if he would devour him. This wasn't a gift Wes was giving him. It was a fulfillment of both their desires. The crash of their lips was painful, moaning, almost violent. Though they were after the same thing now, they still grappled and fought. The battle between them was still going on, transformed and charged with more sexual heat and more intensity than anything Wes could imagine.

He pushed Colin down on the couch and undid his fly. Colin gasped then groaned loudly as Wes freed his cock. As Colin was sprawled and stunned on the couch, Wes kneeled between his legs and slowly took his cock in his mouth. He couldn't stop to appreciate him or to think, or he would lose his nerve. He wanted to slow down and savor him, but he couldn't. All he wanted was Colin's come to flow down his throat. He wanted to hear him scream in ecstasy. He got his wish within minutes. Colin thrust deep into his throat and came with no warning, yelling out his orgasm like it hurt.

Wes looked up at him as he gasped and shuddered. Colin was looking down at him with a shaky smile. Once there wasn't a drop of Colin's come left, Wes moved up his body slowly until he was looking into his eyes. Wes licked up the dimple on his chin to his mouth. Opening his mouth for him, Colin moaned until Wes thrust

his tongue into his mouth. As he held him, almost lifting him off the couch, Wes could feel his body relax with contentment. Their kiss slowed as Colin went limp, smiling up at Wes.

Colin looked dazed, barely conscious one minute then he was on Wes as fierce as ever. Reversing their positions, he pinned Wes to the couch, kissing him and grinding against him like he wasn't satisfied in the least. He was tearing at Wes's fly then groping him franticly when he couldn't get the zipper undone without Wes's cooperation. And Wes wasn't cooperating even when Colin ordered him to lift his damn hips.

"That was just something I wanted to do for you," Wes told him, trying to make him understand.

"And you think I'll let you get away with that? Hi, I'm Colin Rodman, and I'm going to have my way with you. Now cooperate," Colin told him as he tugged at his belt until Wes shifted to give him access.

Colin pushed up Wes's sweater and kissed down the ripples of his abs. Then he slowly unzipped him. Reaching in, Colin felt his cock through his boxers and moaned. He pushed apart his legs like he was angry about anything that stood in his way for even a second.

With his hand cupping Wes's erection, still in his boxers, Colin looked at him seriously. "Don't do what I did and shove it down my throat. I'm not equipped to deal with that."

"I would never do that," Wes assured him. Hardly anyone was equipped for that when it came to his cock. Colin' cock didn't fit down his throat comfortably either, but he had taken it gladly.

"I have no sex manners. Sorry."

"I liked it," Wes told him.

Colin smiled at him shyly. "I am going to make you feel so good," he promised huskily.

He felt Wes's cock grow even bigger and harder in his hand then he pulled it free.

"Damn, damn, damn."

"Are you worried?" Wes asked him.

"I'm in love," Colin said, stroking it with appreciation.

"With my cock? Are you ever going to make eye contact with me again?" Wes asked seeing how enthralled Colin was. And he was

enthralled.

"Probably not," Colin informed him. He didn't take his eyes off it. "I could be sucking on this literally for hours."

"I doubt that. I'll probably come in record time."

"Ooh, a compliment. But seriously, try to hold out. I want the full experience," Colin told him. He was looking into his eyes now and he was unbelievably beautiful.

With one hand holding onto Wes's thigh, Colin gripped the base of his cock. Leaning over him, he opened his mouth around the head and wrapped his lips around it. Wes could feel the flicking of his tongue and he groaned. He watched mesmerized as Colin tried to get as much of his cock into his mouth as he could. He kept his tongue busy as Wes's cock went in deeper. Feeling his cock hit the entrance to his throat, Wes shuddered and gave Colin a warning look. Colin eased off slowly and opened his mouth to show Wes his cock against his tongue. Wes stroked his face softly and Colin got back to sucking.

He was no expert, but it didn't matter. This was Colin's mouth on his cock. It was spectacular. His mouth was like honey. His moans like an electric current. To finish him off, Colin clutched at his thighs for support as he bobbed furiously, his whole body getting into it. Colin licked up his come eagerly as Wes went out of his mind at the sight. The feelings coursing through him fried every nerve in his body.

Running his fingers through Colin's hair, Wes turned his flushed face up for a kiss. The kiss was like nothing he had ever experienced. He felt like Colin was a part of him. He looked at Colin to see if he felt it too. His lips were beautifully swollen, and Wes kissed them again.

Wes spent the rest of that night on the couch with Colin, fending him off. He gave him head again to try to calm him down and for other reasons. Colin wasn't as crazed as he had seen him. Most of the time he was content to lie against Wes and watch Nosferatu and then Willem Dafoe playing Max Schreck playing Nosferatu. Wes occasionally felt that prickle at the base of his skull that horror movies evoked, but with Colin constantly trying to stick his hand

down his pants, he was a little distracted.

The sweetest part of that night was when Colin finally ran out of steam and fell asleep against his shoulder. Wes's arm was around him loosely, but during the night, Colin snuggled up against Wes's chest. Wes wrapped his arms around him to hold him in place, to keep him right where he wanted him. Despite his lingering doubts, this was the most right Wes had ever felt in his life.

Chapter 14

The next day as he was looking forward to going home to Wes, Colin got caught in a downpour. The freezing rain drenched and chilled him to the bone, but he managed to keep his new phone dry and safe. That's what mattered. By the time he got home, his teeth were chattering. It felt like his wet clothes were going to freeze to him.

Once he got up to the apartment, he only poked his head into Wes's office to say hi before he went to change out of his wet things. Then he'd give Wes a proper greeting. Seeing the state he was in, Wes jumped up from his chair. He kind of looked mad. Colin didn't even get a chance to ask him why before Wes hustled him into the bathroom. He turned up the heat on the way and grabbed a stack of towels. He glared at Colin, who was soaked, icy cold and shivering. That wasn't a crime though.

"Get out of those clothes right now. What were you thinking getting wet when it's freezing out there?" Wes scolded as he stripped him.

"The rain falls on the just and the unjust alike," Colin protested through chattering teeth.

"Are you quoting the Bible to me?"

"No?" Colin said.

The attention was kind of nice even if Wes did wear a very grim expression. Clearly Colin's health and wellbeing were close to his heart.

"Why are you smirking?" Wes asked.

"You have your hands all over me, and you're asking me that?" Colin said.

That was only the truth. Wes was stripping him and rubbing any cold skin he exposed. What more could a guy ask for? At the mercy of Wes's strong, efficient hands, Colin was naked in no time. His nipples were hard as steel, but not any other part of him. Shrunk and shivering, he wasn't at his best so he didn't blame Wes for not being overcome and for not ravishing him right there on the bathroom floor. Wes rubbed him with a towel instead. Not letting Wes dry him

off, Colin threw himself into his arms.

"You need to dry off and warm up," Wes told him.

"That's what I'm trying to do. Give me some body heat right now." He grabbed Wes around the neck and kissed him.

Wes pulled back frowning. "You're really cold," he told him. "That was like kissing an ice cube."

"I'm not flattered," Colin said as Wes rubbed him down roughly with a towel. "At least use your hands."

"You mean grope you."

"Yes, that's the stuff. Do it."

"I think you should have a hot shower," Wes said as he stopped drying his hair.

"I'm fine," Colin said finally taking his concern seriously. Then he threw himself into his arms again. Looking up at him, he waited. This time Wes put his arms around him. Colin smiled. "That's all I need."

Wes closed his eyes as Colin pressed up against him.

"You feel good," Colin told him.

Colin was already feeling warmer in his arms, not to mention hard. He hugged him tighter and heard Wes purr in his ear like a big cat. Wes rubbed his back wanting to warm him up and also feel him more fully. Colin could tell that his touch was more intimate now, but then he stopped.

"Sorry. I left in the middle of something I have to deal with. Take a hot shower," Wes said, kissed him quickly and went back to his office.

More like a cold shower. Colin grumbled as he took a shower, but decided not to jerk off in there for once. That was Wes's job now.

"I didn't notice it was raining or I would have come to get you in the car," Wes said when Colin went to bother him in his office.

"Car? What's this car?" Colin asked. This was the first he'd heard of it. He always figured Wes didn't have one.

"It's in the garage," Wes said. He was only half engaged in the conversation, or maybe less. He was busy typing while looking at all of his three monitors.

"Why do we walk everywhere in the middle of fucking winter?" Colin asked.

"I prefer to walk," Wes said like it was a perfectly reasonable answer.

"Why am I surprised? You prefer to have an empty fridge too. I think you just like to torture yourself," Colin told him and leaned against his desk.

Wes nudged him a little out of the way so his view of code or whatever wasn't obscured.

"The car is there if you want to drive it. I start it regularly so it shouldn't give you any trouble."

"How about you?" Colin asked him while inching closer. "You gonna give me trouble?"

"I have something to finish," Wes said while Colin got in his way by throwing one leg on the other side of his chair and straddling him. As Colin sat in his lap, Wes still reached around him, and not to do anything good. He was still fiddling with something for work.

"Hey, eyes on me, hands on me. This is boyfriend time," Colin informed him.

"I'll just tell my clients that my boyfriend was gyrating in my lap and that's why I couldn't get my work done."

"Sounds good to me. Brag about me to everyone," Colin said and leaned in to kiss him.

Wes raised his head and returned the kiss. His tongue slid around, twirling with his own. Colin felt it like a fist wrapped around his cock. It was crazy what Wes did to him. Colin rocked, grinding on Wes's cock still trapped in his jeans but giving him plenty of stimulation anyway.

"Your cock loves me," Colin said feeling it grow under him, bulging dangerously.

"All of me does," Wes said.

Colin was so stunned that he stopped grinding on him. Wes's hands were on Colin's hips, rubbing lightly.

"That's almost what I want to hear," Colin said. He was eyeing Wes, trying to figure out how close he was to saying a real I love you. "I'll ride you so hard you'll have to say you love me," he threatened.

"Not yet," Wes told him.

"That's OK. I can wait," Colin told him, but he was only letting

him off the hook for the words not the deed. There were things that just couldn't wait, like his raging hard-on.

Sliding his hands under Wes's shirt, he stroked his powerful chest and pinched his nipples. That made Wes buck up and grind into Colin harder.

"I like having you in my power. Come on, you big polar bear, maul me."

Wes didn't need to hear it twice. He stood up lifting Colin with him and setting him on his feet.

"Let's do it on the desk," Colin said, but Wes just shook his head and started kissing his neck and groaning in his ear.

Colin pushed him back and pulled his sweater off. God, he was beautiful. Except for being so pale, he was perfect. But Colin didn't have time to feast his eyes on him. Wes pulled him close again. His deep, wet kiss almost knocked Colin off his feet. Wes's hands were rough on him, too strong to resist, groping every inch of him. The mauling left Colin shaking as his own hands bruised Wes's pale flesh. In desperation, Colin bit into his shoulder stopping just short of breaking the skin.

Colin wanted Wes cock in him so bad. "Fuck me," he said to Wes grinding into him.

"No," Wes growled at him and kept kissing him.

Wes kneeled in front of him and opened up his fly roughly. He was more gentle when he took his balls in one hand while using his tongue on the head of his cock. Wes handled his balls with a sure touch. His tongue played over them then each one went into Wes's mouth. Next Wes ran his tongue to the head of his cock. Colin moaned in frustration until Wes's mouth fastened on his cock, giving him some relief.

Under the influence of Wes expertly sucking on his cock, Colin fell back to lean against the desk for support. Wes pulled him forward so he could grope his ass. He then slid his finger down the crack and massaged Colin's hole with his fingertip. Colin moaned and squirmed wanting it inside him dry or not. Wes let only the tip of his finger slip in and Colin was lost, pumping like crazy into Wes's mouth but not too far this time. Damn, it was hard to have any self-control when Wes was doing this to him. When Colin was ready to

come, Wes's finger plunged deeper as he sucked faster and harder. He pulled Colin closer, taking him down his throat and making Colin cry out his name as he came.

Wes stood up and wrapped Colin in his arms. He was dazed for a while with Wes kissing his face and neck but not so out of it that he didn't grope for Wes's cock. He unzipped him. Watching that impressive column of flesh rise made his mouth water. He turned Wes and pushed him up against the desk. With his hands groping down Wes's body, Colin kneeled between his legs.

In front of him was a cock to make men drool, and Colin got to suck it and have it all to himself. He was one lucky son of a bitch. At first, he ran his hand over Wes's cock gently, like he wanted to soothe it. His raging erection only got harder under the teasing touch. Licking around the head, he got ready to take it in. He ran the tip over his lips and opened up for it. He worked what he couldn't fit in his mouth with his fist. He didn't spare himself. Moaning around Wes's cock, he tried to make up for his lack of experience and skill with hard work. Colin was desperate to make him last and to make him come. In the end he was rewarded with Wes's thunderous climax and then a hot kiss.

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Though they had satisfied each other, Colin was back in his lap, less eager but still not letting Wes get back to work.

"And what can I do for you now?" Wes asked him.

"Say you love me," Colin said.

Wes said, "I love you" without missing a beat.

There was a lightning fast I love you from Colin and then a breath-stealing kiss. When Colin pulled back from the kiss he looked at Wes suspiciously.

"That was too easy. You didn't just say that so I would let you get back to work?" Colin accused him.

Wes smiled wickedly.

"That's just evil," Colin said, starting to get up. Wes pulled him closer to make him stay.

"You know I love you," Wes told him. "I wouldn't have started this

if I didn't."

Colin looked shy now and hugged him. "I love you so much," he said sounding like he might cry.

Wes held him tighter. He was a little teary eyed himself. Colin was so wonderful. Wes only wished he was good enough for him.

Colin got up and looked down at him with shining eyes. "OK. You earned this," he said and left him to his work.

Left alone, Wes wondered at himself. He hadn't expected to tell Colin he loved him so soon or so easily. But Colin expected it as his right and as a simple reflection of his own feelings.

Wes's love for Colin had turned from something he was fighting to something that had taken root deep inside him. He breathed it, drank it, and ate himself alive because of it. But he couldn't let his doubts stop him from saying it. He craved Colin down to his bones, with a passion he didn't even know was inside him. As strong as his need was, he wanted Colin to know it was more than that. Since the day Wes met him, Colin had become everything to him.

After hours of work, Wes was ready to go to bed. He wished he could have spent some time with Colin, maybe watching TV, but he had too much work to do. Now it was too late. Colin had already gone to bed. When he got to his bedroom, Wes found that Colin had gone to his bed.

"You didn't expect me to sleep in my own bed, did you? Fat chance. Now climb in here and keep me warm," Colin told him.

Wes just stood there for a minute. He felt as if he should definitely throw him out, but he just couldn't. God, he looked good there waiting for him, pulling back the covers and patting the mattress impatiently.

"I guess we're sharing a bed now," Wes said.

Chapter 15

It was unlike him, but Colin waited for a little while before he bragged to his friends about him and Wes. He didn't want to jinx things. But once Wes said he loved him, he couldn't hold it in any more. Most of his friends congratulated him on a job well done. Colin knew not to expect anything like that from Tyson and Lau. As soon as he told them the good news, Tyson handed Lau a twenty.

"What? You bet on me?" Colin asked indignantly.

Lau corrected him. "I bet on you. Tyson bet against you."

"What do you have to complain about?" Tyson asked Colin. "I'm the one who lost money."

"Serves you right for betting against me," Colin told him.

"Never bet against the pushy, obnoxious guy," Lau told Tyson and rubbed his head.

"I am going to take that as the compliment that it is," Colin told them while they horsed around with each other.

Becky was a lot more enthusiastic.

"That's awesome! I knew you could do it!" she yelled and gave him a big hug. Then she ruined the moment. "Tim is going to kill him. Or they might kill each other. That Wes is pretty big. It's gonna be like watching a tiger fighting a bear."

Colin realized that having friends was way overrated. Speaking of friends, Wes had some news for him when he got home ready to bitch about how some of his friends took the news.

"Pete is in town for a while, and he'll be stopping by. We'll need to get some beer. Pete only drinks St. Pauli Girl. He fell in love with the girl on the label and never fell out of love with her."

"Bigfoot in person. I can't wait," Colin said. So far, Wes refused to be paraded around in front of Colin's friends, but this was a step in the right direction.

When Pete arrived he gave Wes a bear hug and then looked Colin up and down.

"So this is what you reeled in, not bad, not that I am any judge,"

Pete said to Wes then shook Colin's hand.

Pete was the more impressive sight. Really, the pictures didn't do him justice. His beard needed a trim or maybe just to be shaved off. His hair was overgrown and shaggy. His clothes were sloppy, and he had a beer belly that according to Wes was well deserved. He was friendly and at ease with himself and everyone else. Colin liked him already, but mostly he liked him for being Wes's friend and for sticking by him all these years. That's what Colin wanted to do. He wanted to stick to Wes like glue.

"The drive was hell. Give me a beer," Pete said before he had his puffy jacket all the way off. "Love what you've done with the place." He said this to Colin. Basically, he was congratulating him on the mess. Wes's place just wasn't the same with Colin's stuff everywhere.

"It's like a warm blooded human lives here," Colin said.

"At least one," Pete said and looked at Wes. He saluted them both with the beer bottle before taking a long swallow.

Colin asked him about why he was in town.

"I'm here visiting the folks," Pete said. "I figured I drop in on this guy and see what he's been up to. My dad is having knee replacement surgery, and I'll be sticking around, helping out a little."

"That's good of you," Colin told him.

"Nah. I can work from anywhere so it's no big deal," Pete said modestly.

While Wes was busy in the kitchen with the lasagna he had made for Pete, Colin wanted to pick his brain about their college days. "Was it weird for you to live with him?" Colin asked Pete.

"I held my ground. If he said anything about me cleaning up, I'd just be all 'Mom? Who sneaked my mom in here?' College was my chance to turn myself into a living monument to slob and sloth. I wasn't going to let the Snowman or anyone ruin that for me."

"I meant because he is gay," Colin said though after all that it seemed pointless to even mention it.

"Oh, that." Pete shrugged. "How do you do it?"

"Live with a gay guy?"

"Live with a neat freak."

"He's not so bad," Colin said and smiled at Wes who was suffering

through their conversation with an impassive face.

"That there is the sound of a guy in love," Pete said, talking to Wes and pointing at Colin. "Wes, man, make no mistake about it, living with you is hell."

"I told you I was awesome," Colin said to Wes, who looked from him to Pete and sighed.

"As you can see, he doesn't need any encouragement. Why are you cheerleading for him?" Wes asked Pete.

"What kind of shitty friend would he be if he didn't want you to have a kick-ass boyfriend like me?" Colin jumped in to say.

"Exactly my thinking," Pete said to Colin. "Wes here is a good guy. He works hard, OK, too hard. I figure he deserves a young boyfriend with lots of energy and enthusiasm to work off the stress. One day I hope to follow in his footsteps. I want a cute, enthusiastic young girlfriend always grinding in my lap so I can't get any work done."

"How do you know I do that?" Colin asked, surprised that Wes would tell him that.

"I didn't, and now that I do, I'm a little freaked out," Pete said. That did sound more like the tightlipped Wes Colin knew and adored.

"Well that girlfriend stuff freaked me out too," Colin shot back.

"Then we're even," Pete said and raised his beer to him.

"You two get along too well," Wes said while pretending not to be happy about it.

Since he knew Pete did some kind of technical work too, Colin asked him what he did.

"Oh, it's totally cool," Pete said and then he went on and explained what he did, and it totally wasn't cool. At least Wes knew his work was boring and that no one wanted to hear about it. No wonder Colin loved Wes so much.

Pete's visit gave Colin the idea to invite some of his friends over. He started with Tyson and Lau since they were the most civilized, but that wasn't saying much. This time Colin wanted to cook. He had watched Wes make the lasagna, and he thought he could manage it.

"I've seen what happens when you learn by watching," Wes told him.

"It wasn't hard. Let me cook."

"No. I want to make a good impression."

"But they are my friends," Colin pointed out.

"And my guests. You can help. What do your friends like to eat?" Wes asked.

"Lau likes normal food, but Tyson likes salad and steamed vegetables, crap like that."

"Then lasagna would have been the wrong thing to make," Wes told him. "I'm cooking. You're going shopping."

Colin saluted him smartly and started a shopping list.

Maybe he didn't get to cook, but Colin did get to plan the menu with Wes. He also helped him cook. It was nice. They were entertaining friends as a couple. And not just friends, another couple just like them. This was sweet. It was even sweeter when Tyson and Lau arrived and got an eyeful of Wes.

"I was sure you were lying," Tyson whispered to him when he saw that Wes was just as described.

"Stop drooling over him," Colin told both him and Lau.

Lau was removing his jacket in slow motion as he stared at Wes.

"He's not even my type," Lau claimed pointing at the dark and skinny Tyson as proof.

"Wes is not a type. He's every man's wet dream," Colin said.

"Please stop," Wes begged him.

"Stop embarrassing you? Never," Colin declared then he did formal introductions.

"He's just proud of you and doesn't know how to shut up about it," Tyson told Wes as he shook his hand and gave Colin a sideways look.

"And Tyson is always telling me to play it cool," Colin said.

"Good advice is wasted on you," Tyson said with a shake of his head.

"Shouldn't we be on our best behavior or something?" Lau asked helplessly.

Wes smiled at him and invited them to sit at the table.

The food was a success. Wes was quiet but he smiled at the constant arguments Tyson was starting and Lau was encouraging.

Colin got to run his mouth nonstop so it was a good time.

Playing hosts with Wes put Colin in the mood for a fuck. It was only what Wes owed him and it was overdue. But Wes didn't see it that way. He made Colin come by sucking him off. Then Colin had to settle for sucking him off in return. OK, he loved every minute of it, but he bitched about being denied a fuck anyway.

The lights were out in Wes's bedroom. Pale moonlight came in through the windows making Wes's skin look like perfect marble while his eyes looked annoyed with Colin and also gorgeous.

"Couldn't we just go to sleep?" Wes asked.

"We could have if you had fucked me first." Colin tried for some emotional blackmail. "Maybe if you loved me..."

"I do love you," Wes said, but he tried to downplay it.

Colin fitted himself against Wes's side. In a husky voice, he spoke in his ear. "Then make me feel it. Fuck me."

"No," Wes told him flatly.

"Maybe you need to love me more." Colin gripped him tighter but Wes was unmoved.

"Impossible. I love you with all my being," Wes claimed.

Colin wanted solid, hard proof of that. "Does that include your cock?"

"Colin, let me breathe. I need to get used to this," Wes pleaded with him so Colin adopted a different tactic.

"Then just talk to me. Tell me what the problem is," Colin said hoping he could shoot down all his arguments.

Wes saw right through that. "You want me to tell you so you can disagree with everything I say?"

"Probably," Colin admitted.

"OK. If you want to talk, I want to hear your plans for the future. For yourself, not for us," Wes said, knowing why Colin opened his mouth so eagerly.

Colin crossed his arms under his head and leaned back. He had already given his own future a little thought. No, he didn't want to keep working at the diner all his life, but it did give him an idea.

"I was thinking maybe I'll save enough money and go to cooking school. Then I'll knock your socks off, and you won't be able to

resist me, my sweet ass or my cooking."

"Your cooking is improving all the time," Wes told him.

"You didn't let me cook for my own friends," Colin reminded him, but Wes turned to him with something more serious to say.

"If you want to go to school, you don't have to wait. I have plenty of money to pay for it."

"Are you rich?" Colin asked. He knew Wes's business did pretty well, but he didn't want to sponge off him more than he already had.

"Not exactly. My grandparents left me some money. They were frugal. I didn't even know how much money they had until they died. They left me a trust fund, but most of the money was earmarked for my psychiatric care and even institutionalization if I should ever succumb to mental illness." Wes showed no emotion as he said this, but Colin was pretty damn outraged.

"Damn," Colin said, sitting up. "That's the future they saw for you? It's their fault I'm not getting the fucking I rightly deserve. They messed you up."

"They witnessed what happened to my mother. How she went from their sweet little girl to a lunatic who came home with injuries she couldn't explain, who had to be drugged and restrained for her own protection."

Colin wondered how much of that Wes had seen for himself. It must have been terrifying to believe that that would be him one day. What a terrible shadow to live under, especially for a kid.

"Still. They infected you with all that fear. And you're fine," Colin pointed out.

"The verdict isn't in yet. They could still be right. And if one day I go crazy like my mother?" Wes asked, looking sad at the prospect.

"I'll be right there driving you even crazier," Colin vowed, meaning it with all his heart.

"That's comforting," Wes said with a wry smile.

"I'm not going to hold my breath wondering if you're going to go nuts. If it happens, we'll handle it." Colin hugged him. With a solemn look, he silently promised to deal with whatever came their way. But he wasn't going to get snowed under by a big maybe looming over their future. He followed up his promise with a kiss and a grope to let Wes know his priorities hadn't changed.

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Wes had to laugh. Colin had such a sane attitude about Wes's future. As Wes held him, he felt boundless strength flowing from him. If only Wes had grown up with someone like him to watch over him. Until he met Colin, optimism seemed unthinkable in his life.

From his grandparents Wes learned to expect the worst. Through the years, their look of concern and unwavering fear was a constant in his life. There was love there too. He was undeniably precious to them, but having their watchful eyes on him froze him up inside.

Wes always wondered if there was something already broken inside him. There might be a crack just waiting for the right kind of pressure to split his mind open. How could a fault like that withstand Colin and all the impossible highs of Wes's feelings for him? Colin was turmoil, passion, anguish, and most of all a devastating, feverish love. He was an earthquake who had torn apart Wes's restrained existence. He was everything Wes had guarded against. That's why he resisted Colin as long as he could. That's why he was still holding back.

Seeing that Colin was gazing at him quietly while he was lost in thought, Wes ran his hand over Colin's curly hair. He was amazed at how much pleasure he got from touching Colin anywhere. Colin entwined his fingers with Wes's and leaned his head on his shoulder. Wes brought up their clasped hands to hold close against his chest. In a more sober mood now, Colin lay quietly, but his eyes were bright in the dim glow of moonlight that bathed the room. His eyes both asked and promised so much.

Chapter 16

After last night, Colin understood Wes better and he was glad. He wanted Wes to tell him everything the good, the bad, and even the boring. But that would have to wait. For now, his first priority was purely physical. They had plenty of time to tell each other all their stories. As long as Wes loved him, there was nothing standing in their way. Colin just had to convince Wes of that or just plain seduce him. He wanted to show him, make him feel it down to his bones. This is us. We're strong. Unbreakable.

All next day, the overpowering need to have Wes was building inside him. It wouldn't let him wait. Being good was too hard. He couldn't take it any more. Just waiting for Wes to come to bed tapped out his patience. Colin was determined to get his way. As soon as Wes came to the bedroom, Colin made his demand. Wes was barely through the door, and Colin was on him.

"I'm done waiting. I want to fuck."

"It's only been twenty four hours since I asked you for a little time," Wes pointed out reasonably.

"That is a little time. And why is everything a battle with you?" Colin asked pulling at his clothes, wishing that he could just rip them off.

"Because you always want to rush me," Wes told him matter-of-factly while Colin kissed his neck.

"I'll make the decision easy for you. Give me what I want, or give me what I want." Colin wrapped himself around him and squeezed his muscular ass. He was making it clear that this time he wouldn't be denied. Gripping Wes's ass, he pushed their cocks together hard. A groan rumbled through Wes's powerful chest. Colin loved that he could make him do that. Pressed up fully against Wes, he could feel every reaction, especially the quick hardening of his cock.

"I'm going to drive you so crazy," Colin promised and kneeled in front of him. He freed his cock with shaking hands. OK. He was a little nervous. He rubbed his hands together to make sure they were warm and to steady them before he started stroking Wes's cock. It wasn't fully hard yet. With his hand wrapped around it like he was

measuring it, Colin pumped lightly. Coming alive under his touch, Wes's cock swelled into an impossibly rigid column. Colin held his breath.

"Did you change your mind?" Wes asked him in a deep soothing, voice.

Colin just had to show a hint of hesitation and Wes would back off. Colin swiped his tongue over the head of his cock and looked up at him to show him how sure he was.

"I know I'm in good hands. And what I lack in experience, I make up for in pure, manly talent for fucking," Colin told him.

Wes still had doubt in his eyes so Colin stood up and kissed him. As they kissed, he felt Wes's arms go around him. Wes was holding him tight as his tongue reached deep into Colin's mouth. In that kiss, he could feel that Wes's answer was finally a yes. A tremor ran through him at the realization that this was really happening. It was too wonderful. Wes was giving in. But suddenly Colin pulled back. He had to stare hard at Wes, at those calm gray eyes he loved. He wanted to read in them Wes's wish, not just his own.

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With Colin looking into his eyes, Wes felt his fears slipping away. Maybe life wasn't just waiting and wondering if one day he would go insane. Maybe he was done waiting and happiness was now waiting for him in Colin's eyes and in his arms. His heart was telling him to surrender to love and give up his fight for sanity. Only then could he give in and fuck him.

After giving him a searching look, Colin leaned in and bit his lower lip lightly. Next Colin used his teeth on his earlobe. His heart pounded in his ears deafeningly as Colin stripped him. Wes kissed him whenever he could get him to hold still, but Colin's priority was to get them naked, first Wes then himself.

Now that Wes was standing naked in front if him, Colin had to kiss him all over. His mouth was hot on Wes's skin. Colin's kisses lingered, melting him. The shape of his lips was burned into his skin. With every touch, every kiss, lick, and bite, Colin was asserting his unbreakable claim on him. Wes knew he would have to fuck him.

He pulled Colin up to him and kissed him. The kiss was deliberately slow to let Colin taste the pleasure of getting his way.

Wes felt such a deep, aching love for him. He couldn't breathe if he really let himself think of it and feel it. It took over his whole body as if every muscle and organ was involved, not just his head and his heart. It wasn't a matter of deciding to give into it. It had already taken him over. Love was too strong for him. It bound him and handed him over to Colin. Now Colin chained him in his arms, and his eyes begged for even more of him. Wes was his prisoner. He couldn't say no.

Taking a big, shaky breath, Colin pushed him backwards until he had him on the bed. Wes pointed to his nightstand, and Colin went over to get condoms and lube. As Colin walked to him, Wes's greedy eyes took in every inch of his body, lingering lovingly on his hard cock. Its lewd, swaying motion enthralled him.

"You are perfection," he whispered as he looked up at Colin.

"Are you blind? My balls are uneven." Colin jerked his cock a few times and displayed his balls.

"Oh, are they?" Wes said as if he hadn't noticed everything about them while he had them in his mouth. "You're right. I take it back. You are hideous. A freak of nature," Wes teased him while grasping the backs of his thighs, spreading his legs, and bringing him closer.

"Dick," Colin said then gasped as Wes handled his balls lightly.

The slight unevenness was hardly noticeable, as were all Colin's imperfections. They all meant that he was a real human being and all the more beautiful for it.

Colin ran his hands over Wes's shoulders and down his chest. Wes's nerves thrummed under his touch. They looked into each other's eyes with the heightened awareness of what they were about to do. Colin leaned down for a kiss. Threading his fingers through Colin's hair, Wes pulled him in deeper as if the kiss was everything not just the beginning.

"Get on the bed," Wes told him in the same moment that he pulled out of that kiss.

They both breathed hard. It was like they kissed under water and only now came up for air.

Wes guided Colin where he wanted him – on the edge of the bed,

head down, knees folded up under him. Wes leaned over him and kissed the back of his neck. He drew his hands over Colin's outstretched arms to his hands clutching the sheets. From his neck, he kissed down Colin's spine. His tongue slid along his body. Wes lifted Colin's hips and moved his legs further apart. As he kneeled behind him, he pressed his face into him and let Colin feel his mouth at his hole. His tongue flicked it then pushed in as Colin whimpered. Colin didn't endure it for long. He grabbed lube and shoved it at Wes.

At first, Wes only teased his hole with the tip of his lubed finger. Colin groaned into the mattress then turned his head to glare at Wes. "This is where I start making death threats and calling you names," he warned Wes.

"I love you too. And I want you more than anything," Wes told him. "But your rushed me enough today. Don't you think?"

"You want to drive? Then drive," Colin said, giving him a challenging look over his shoulder.

Wes bit his hip lightly as he pushed a finger inside him. The tightness almost made him stop and just call the whole thing off. But he couldn't. And it wasn't because of Colin's wrath. He couldn't stop himself. One word from Colin could stop him dead, but everything inside him screamed "fuck him". Wes worked a single finger in and out as his heart beat like thunder. His breathing was ragged, and his head was swimming.

"One more," Colin demanded.

He moaned as Wes added another finger. The third went in with a lot of lube. There was still too much resistance. Colin's moans were deep, long, and pleading. Wes watched his fingers disappear inside him and felt him push back hard, needing more. He was more than ready. Wes just wasn't so sure about himself.

"Turn over," Wes told him. He needed to look at him. As soon as Colin turned on his back, Wes knew he never wanted to stop looking at him. The smile barely curving his lips and the molten passion in his eyes made him look angelic and indecent, begging to be fucked.

"I want to fuck you until I can't breathe, make up for depriving myself all this time," Wes told him.

"You deprived me too," Colin whispered and licked his lower lip.

He raised his legs to Wes's shoulders and mouthed I love you. Wes leaned down and Colin raised his head for a kiss.

Colin moaned as soon as he felt Wes's cock at his entrance. Wes had barely touched him. When he pushed in, Colin threw his head back and clenched his teeth. His ass clamped around him, and Wes stopped, panting. He gave Colin a minute and rubbed his ass. On the next try, he only got a little further. Colin groaned and clawed at his arms.

"Sorry. I'm not making it easy on you," Colin said with a teasing smile as sweat beaded on his skin. He was breathing hard.

"I wasn't expecting easy with you," Wes said, smiling too.

Colin was so tight but so willing too. Wes put more pressure into it to get his body to agree. Colin shuddered and stopped him with a hand on his chest.

"I can't believe I asked for this and now I can't take it." He looked up at Wes with a frown.

"You can take it," Wes told him.

Colin smiled. "I'm going to prove you right," he promised.

Wes pressed in again and gained a little more ground. He could feel Colin's body start to accept him. By the time he was all the way in, Colin was drenched in sweat and shaking, but his eyes were so happy. Wes rocked against him before he pulled back and watched Colin's whole body react with a shudder.

Wes pumped back in, fucking him with slow, rolling movements. Colin's ass throbbed around him. His grip on Wes's cock had barely loosened since his first thrust.

Wes couldn't stand the thought that he might be hurting him, but the need to fuck him was more powerful than anything he ever felt. It wasn't a sane need. It was a need that obliterated everything in its path. Concern and even love were nothing to his need to fuck Colin, but he still strained to hear even a hint of pain. All he heard was heavy breathing and moaning and Colin calling his name.

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It was a harsh kind of pleasure being stretched open by a big cock. Colin thought he would come in no time, but taking Wes was harder

than he expected. Wes's cock felt massive inside him. Wes was being cruel and kind by taking him so slowly, letting him fully experience every inch.

Even when he started pumping into him, it was slow and agonizingly good. It was like Wes's cock went right up his spine at each thrust. With Wes's cock so far inside him, Colin felt like he couldn't take a deep breath. He wanted to laugh and cry and, oh God, he wanted to be filled up like this forever. But he wanted to come too.

"Stop holding back. I've been waiting too long for this," Colin said. He could hardly speak.

"So have I. If I don't restrain myself, I'll rip into you and fuck you with no mercy," Wes warned him. He turned his head and kissed Colin's leg resting on his shoulder.

"Hot and also scary," Colin told him with a smirk.

"I won't do that. That's why I'm holding back. I'll be gentle and considerate to the end."

"Split the difference!" Colin demanded since that sounded terrible. "Fuck me till I can't stand it."

Wes increased the speed and power slowly, but Colin knew he would get it harder and faster at every thrust, and he loved it. He felt himself shuddering uncontrollably, tensing under Wes's heavy pounding. A devastating force was building inside him. At its peak, his whole body turned to steel and then was shattered. This wasn't coming. It was every force of nature unleashed inside him. He yelled and screamed and came like never before. The grip of his climax released him into a freefall. He fell from its heights on his back again under Wes. Wes was watching him come, slowing his thrusts like he would stop.

"I'm happy. Don't stop. Keep doing what you're doing," Colin told him.

Wes nodded. Colin would swear that he couldn't speak. God, Colin loved him.

Wes fucked him slower now, but Colin could tell he was close. Colin groped him roughly, silently begging him to come for him. Powerful muscles slick with sweat, Wes started slamming in. Colin braced himself against the force of his thrusts. His hips were off the

bed, in Wes's grip as he hammered deep inside him. Wes was finally coming. Colin opened his eyes wide to take in the sight. Wes's eyes looked into his. They were fierce and wild with the surge of pleasure that turned his whole body into stone. Colin said his name over and over again as Wes roared through his orgasm.

Drenched in sweat, limbs useless and heavy, Colin was dead from exhaustion. He was only solid and real and barely conscious because Wes held him tightly and whispered his name with so much love. Colin turned his head to smile at him. He was so in love. He felt it more than ever now. Fucking someone you loved was really something.

"You made me so happy," he said to Wes.

In return, Wes gave him a shy smile and kissed him softly. That's the last thing Colin remembered until he woke up feeling Wes breathing and hearing his heartbeat. Some time during the night Colin must have climbed on top of him. It was a good place to be.

Waking up in Wes's arms, head resting on his muscular chest was like opening his eyes to heaven. He kissed his way up to Wes's mouth and let him feel his hard cock along the way. He pushed it into Wes's hip insistently, not as a request but as a demand.

Wes turned him over gently. He gave him a quick kiss then moved down his body to his hard cock. Colin hissed as Wes took him in his mouth. It felt so good on top of all of last night's memories packed into his brain. He came too fast, surprising both himself and Wes.

"Sorry," he said as he watched Wes lick him clean and then lick his lips. "After last night, I'm walking around with my safety off. You just have to look at me, and I'm ready to shoot."

"I got what I needed," Wes told him and grinned.

He moved back up Colin's body and kissed him to give him a taste of his come.

Chapter 17

As he got up after only letting Colin give him a handjob, Wes was in a daze. Everything around him seemed crisp and clear but somehow more unreal. There it was. His mind was losing its grip on reality. Wes laughed. But it was hard to believe that sex could do this to him. He had fucked before, and that wasn't fucking. Making love seemed like the wrong term. Words didn't fit the facts any more. Another sign of insanity?

He decided to make breakfast to try to anchor himself to something real and ordinary, but his whole body felt like it was overlaid with new skin. It was both more sensitive and somehow numb. As he was puzzling over the strange state of his senses, he turned to find Colin in front of him. He was smiling and throwing himself into his arms. He felt so good and right. He fit his embrace perfectly. Maybe that's why Wes didn't feel right with himself. He only felt right when Colin was kissing him with his hand on the back of his head tugging at his hair.

Wes didn't realize that he was letting his mood show until Colin called him on it.

"Why so gloomy?" Colin asked him. But even before Wes had a chance to answer, he warned him, "If you regret even one second of what happened between us last night, I will never forgive you. God help you if you try to pull away from me now. I've had a taste of you. I am never letting you go. Never."

Actually what Colin said wasn't that far from how Wes felt. His fear was mixed with too much love for Wes to breathe easy or to ever let go.

"I'm not regretting anything," Wes assured him. "But I have concerns."

"No concerns. Just be happy with me," Colin demanded and slipped into Wes's arms.

"I am," Wes told him and they kissed until Colin looked over his shoulder at the unmade breakfast.

They made breakfast together and ate it on the couch. Colin wanted to sit somewhere soft. Wes felt guilty, but Colin cut him off when he

said he was sorry.

"You will not apologize for the best night of my life," he told Wes.

They set their empty plates and cups on the coffee table. Colin stretched out on the couch and Wes held him. No matter what happened, Wes knew he would never be free of this feeling. It was bigger than him now. He existed inside his love for Colin. That's why he felt so strange this morning. He was a new man now. He was a man who belonged to Colin completely.

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Wes seemed willing to stay and snuggle with him late into the morning, but Colin knew he must be dying to get to work like usual. Colin took advantage of him for a little while then sent him to his office. Wes was such a good boyfriend. Colin wanted to be a good boyfriend too, especially after last night.

Colin was elated, flying high all morning. Wes was his. He really was. That knowledge was stamped into his flesh now. That's why he couldn't sit at the dining table. He didn't mind. It was a good kind of sore, a solid reminder that he got properly fucked. He wanted to open the windows and shout it to the world. "My man fucked me and it was fucking glorious!"

Too bad his good mood couldn't last all day. Right when he was going to get ready to go to work, Colin got a phone call from Tim. It wasn't his usual nagging. It was weird from the get-go. For one thing, Tim usually texted. Short and to the point was his style.

"Where are you?" Tim said sharply as soon as Colin answered. That was a weird thing to ask from all the way up in Canada.

"The U.S. of A," Colin said.

"Colin," Tim said. His voice was low and stern. Colin could picture his jaw clenching. From his tone, Colin could tell that he had heard something pretty damn serious. He had a guess about who was telling him things.

"What did Brad tell you?" Colin asked, cutting right to the chase. Though he asked, he didn't wait for an answer before he continued. "Don't you dare believe him over me!"

"What am I supposed to believe exactly? You aren't telling me shit!"

"And I am not going to," Colin told him. "Not over the phone. Just don't believe anything Brad tells you. You and I are going to have this out face to face. OK?"

"Do I have a choice?"

"No."

Next thing he knew, Tim was telling him that he would see him as soon as he could drive down. Colin couldn't believe what he was hearing. He didn't even have time to react before Tim hung up. He knew Tim wasn't going to get time off before Christmas, but he was still coming down to sort him out. Damn it. Colin thought he had more time.

He went over to Wes in his office. Noticing his low-key approach, Wes turned away from the computer and gave him his full attention.

"Tim is coming down," Colin told him. Wes was way easier to talk to than Tim. Colin could just blurt out whatever he wanted, no problem.

"Isn't that a good thing?" Wes asked, seeing that Colin didn't look happy about it.

"He's driving down because he heard something about me. I don't know how I'm going to explain things to him. Not about you or about that lying sack of shit, Brad."

"Does your brother know you're gay?" Wes asked, always so practical.

"No."

"Then you'll need to start with that," Wes told him.

Colin knew he was right. "That's kind of overdue. I should have told him before, but I didn't know how he would take it. It was easier not to tell him."

"Are you going to tell him about his sleazy friend?"

"Can't," Colin said, pouting.

"Your brother deserves to know that he can't be trusted."

Colin didn't disagree. "And Brad deserves to get the beatdown of his life. But that's just like handing Tim a 'Go directly to jail' card. I won't do it."

"You should tell him," Wes insisted, but Colin wasn't swayed.

He knew Tim. He was protective and he had a temper. That wasn't a good combination.

"No. I'm sick of being a screw-up. I'm sick of Tim making sacrifices for me. I don't want him going to jail after he caves Brad's skull in on account of me."

"If Tim has such a terrible temper, why isn't Brad afraid of him?" Wes wanted to know.

"They've been friends forever. Brad thinks he can weasel his way out of it. I bet he thinks Tim is going to turn against me for being gay."

"Is he?" Wes asked worriedly.

"No," Colin said, but he wasn't sure how Tim felt about gay people. He wasn't very expressive.

"You think he might..."

"No! I won't let him," Colin practically shouted. "If he doesn't like it, too damn, fucking bad. He's the only brother I got. He better not even think of turning his back on me, or I'll fucking kill him."

"Is this brotherly love?"

"Damn right!" Colin said and left Wes's office so he could get ready for his shift at the diner.

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As he turned back to his work, Wes couldn't deny that he was uneasy about Tim's return. He was too important in Colin's life, and Colin was too important to Wes. He didn't want Tim to come between them, but he also feared that he might come between Colin and his brother. Even if Tim accepted Colin when he came out to him, he couldn't possibly approve of his relationship with someone like Wes.

Wes didn't want to dread the brothers' reunion, but even Colin had mixed feelings about seeing Tim again. But he was Colin. Nothing held him back for long. Colin's eyes blazed when he talked about not allowing his brother to reject him. In Colin, Wes saw determination and love overcoming fear. There was a down side to that though. Colin only knew how to strive for what he wanted. He didn't know

how to protect his heart, and that scared Wes. If Colin didn't protect himself then anyone could hurt him, and not just his brother, Wes too. At the thought that anyone might break Colin's heart, Wes felt a terrible ache in his chest.

That was something else he would have to get used to. Protectiveness, pain, dread – they were all part of love. His love for Colin had reached such depths and heights that Wes couldn't give up any of it. Even the worst of it meant that he finally had something he never dared to dream about. So he would take all of it. He would take those luscious lips always moving with compulsive chatter, the way Colin felt pressed up against him, the way he looked into his eyes like Wes was something he owned.

Chapter 18

Two days later, Colin was about to go to work. He was ready to put on his shoes when he got a text. It was from Tim. He had arrived a day early, and he was waiting for Colin in front of Penny's. Colin jumped up and almost ran out of the apartment without his shoes on. After a quick word to Wes, Colin put on his shoes and jacket and sprinted out of the apartment.

Despite his surprise, Colin still tackled Tim and crushed him in the biggest hug ever. Even if he was worried about what would happen between them, Colin was so happy to see Tim again. It felt like he was gone a million years.

"Hey, little bro," Colin said to him once Tim wrestled free of him with a huff. It was a running joke between them because Colin was an inch or two taller than Tim. Tim more than made up for it in bulk. Calling Tim little bro or Tiny Tim was usually good for half a smile or at least an annoyed look. Today Tim stayed stone-faced.

"Why the hell didn't you wait inside? And why are you're a day early?" Colin said.

"I didn't want to stop and waste time and money sleeping in some crappy motel."

"Right, Being indoors where it's warm, sleeping, that's for wimps. Let's go in." Colin moved to go inside Penny's, but Tim wouldn't budge.

"You can take a few minutes to show me where you live," Tim ordered him. He obviously wasn't in the mood for any more chitchat.

"First I'm going to show you where I work and get some food in you. I don't want to listen to you and your stomach growling at me," Colin told him and led the way inside.

Tim came along though he didn't look happy about the delay. This would give Colin a chance to tell him about Wes before Tim tried to tear his head off and stuff it down his neck hole. Colin ordered Tim two burgers and fries. While he waited on those, Colin got Mr. Snyder to let him have an hour off to deal with things.

As he delivered the food to Tim, Colin sat across from him. Tim was more grim and closemouthed than usual as he ate.

"How was it working for Cousin Frank?" Colin asked. He didn't want to lead with the heavy stuff though it wasn't much better to leave it hanging over his head.

"It was OK," Tim said as he scarfed down his first burger.

"So do you know how to make furniture now?" Colin asked to try and keep the conversation going.

"I know how to drive a forklift," Tim said before he downed half a bottle of water.

"I thought Frank was going to let you out of the warehouse to learn some furniture making."

"I was supposed to start on that this week, but I had to come down here instead." Tim followed that up with a hard look at Colin.

Colin didn't let him stare him down. He just waited for the rest.

"What the hell have you been doing?" Tim asked.

"I think a better question is who the hell have you been listening to? Or should I guess?" Colin said.

"Why did you move out of Brad's?" Tim asked.

"We just couldn't get along," Colin said. There was plenty of truth to that, but he had to wonder what Brad had told Tim to make him look at Colin like that.

Tim furrowed his brow, and Colin waited. When he was younger, that glowering look could make him confess all his crimes. This time he was only guilty of hiding things to protect Tim, and he wasn't about to confess to that. He did want to be honest about things that were a lot more important to him than that scumbag Brad.

"If you want to hear me out, I have a couple of pieces of news for you," Colin said.

"Really?" Tim said, not hiding how angry he was.

"Yes. I just didn't want to tell you over the phone that I'm gay. Or did you want me to text you about that?" Colin asked him.

"And the rest?" Tim said, not reacting to his first piece of news at all.

Colin paused to make sure Tim really had nothing to say about him being gay, then he moved on. "After I couldn't stay at Brad's, I started living with this guy. His name is Wes. And we're, you know, doing it. Not just doing it. I'm into this guy. I mean I'm serious about him. And he's just plain serious." Colin took a deep breath. There

was no good way to talk about this kind of stuff with his brother, especially while Tim was sitting there like a statue.

"Let's go," Tim said and got up. He threw some money on the table including a good tip. He was out the door before Colin even had time to put his jacket back on.

"Put your damn jacket on," Tim barked at him when he saw he was carrying it.

"When?" Colin said as he caught up to him.

Tim had seen which direction he came from when he arrived so he knew to head up the street.

"Wait. I wasn't done talking," Colin said. He grabbed Tim's arm, wanting to have it out, but Tim tore himself out of his grip.

"You can walk and talk, can't you?" Tim said and just kept moving.

"I can talk and do pretty much anything," Colin boasted. He wasn't sure what to think of Tim's bad attitude. He didn't even flinch when Colin told him about being gay. Even if Brad told him first, it wasn't the same as hearing it from Colin himself. Tim's whole focus seemed to be on Wes. That wasn't a good sign.

As they went up in the elevator, Colin remembered all of Tim's warnings not to ride in them. He wanted to point out to Tim that this was a good place if they could ride the elevator with no fear and without holding their breaths. Mainly he wanted to tell Tim that Wes was a good guy, the best, and that he had nothing to worry about. But that wouldn't work. Tim was going to see Wes for himself and then he would make up his own mind about him.

Colin hadn't warned Wes that they were coming. He wanted Tim to barge in, maybe find Wes, the workaholic, hard at work. Tim would respect that about him. Colin knocked just to give Wes a heads up. When they went in, Wes was waiting in the living room. Even with no warning, Wes knew to expect them.

"Stop being psychic. It's creepy," Colin told him as he closed the door behind Tim. "This is my brother Tim. He wanted to check you out. He said he wanted to see where I lived, but we both know what he really meant," Colin said turning to Tim accusingly. "That's Wes. Have a good, long look."

"Does he have a last name?" Tim asked.

"What, you want to google him? Have at it. You'll just find boring, computer, nerd, business stuff," Colin informed him.

"Wes Ingram," Wes said and offered Tim his hand.

Tim refused to take it.

"Don't mind him. He's been driving non-stop. He hasn't had any sleep. That's why he's so cranky," Colin told Wes while he glared at Tim for being rude. "You going to ask him what his intentions are?"

"I already know about his intentions," Tim said with a harsh, condemning stare at Wes.

Colin didn't like his look one bit. Wes was an awesome guy, and no one should be looking at him like that, least of all Colin's own brother.

"Hey, he isn't the enemy. He was nice enough to give me a place to live," Colin told him.

"Real nice to shack up with some kid he picked up off the street," Tim said, and Wes seemed willing to let him say whatever he wanted. He didn't even react when Tim got right in his face, or as close as he could with his height disadvantage. Though strong, he was half a head shorter than Wes, not that Tim let that intimidate him. He looked ready to squash Wes, and Wes looked ready to let him.

"It wasn't off the street. It was at the diner down the street. And I am an adult. Get that through your thick skull!" Colin said and pulled Tim away from Wes. "What's the big deal anyway? I just have a boyfriend now."

"That?" Tim said pointing at Wes.

Colin pulled his arm down.

"You don't like my choice? Did you think you were going to be picking my boyfriend for me as well as making every other decision in my life?"

"He isn't your boyfriend," Tim said like he did mean to make that decision.

"I say he is."

"You're blind. You think you owe this guy," Tim said.

"I do owe him, but I am with him because I'm in love with him."

"You might think you are..." Tim started to say, but Colin wasn't going to let him get away with it.

"You don't get to decide whether I'm in love or not. No one does except me." He shot a look at Wes too to let him know he was included in that statement. The way Wes was just standing there, Colin wasn't sure whose side he was on. He wasn't saying one word in his own defense.

"And why are you just standing there. Speak up for yourself. He's slandering you," Colin tried to prod him.

"He hasn't said anything that isn't true," Wes told Colin calmly, infuriating him.

"You two should go have a beer, become best buddies. You both agree that I'm a moron. Go, decide what I should be feeling and how I should be living my life!"

"I'm not saying that. But I'm not going to pretend that this is an ideal situation," Wes said in that low, even tone.

"Right now I don't know which one of you is pissing me off more," Colin told them both.

"You don't have any reason to be angry with your brother for being concerned about you," Wes said.

"I don't need you defending me. In fact I don't need to hear one thing from you," Tim said to Wes.

"In my own house, I think I'll speak or not as I see fit," Wes said coldly, eyeing both Tim and Colin.

Tim looked grim at his words, but Colin beamed proudly at him.

"There you go, showing us those big balls of yours that I love," Colin said.

Wes covered his face and hung his head as he groaned in embarrassment. Tim looked equally uncomfortable. Colin was the only one enjoying himself.

"Now unless you want me oversharing some more, maybe telling you how much I love his cock and his balls, you will make peace with this," Colin told Tim.

Tim looked ready to wring his neck while Wes begged him to shut up. Colin gave Tim a challenging look. Even as Tim glared at him, Colin could tell that he was backing down. Shaking his head, Tim moved to go. He didn't seem as angry as when he came but only by a little. He must have realized that Wes wasn't the problem. Colin was and always would be Tim's biggest headache.

"I'll walk you out. I have to get back to work anyway," Colin said. It was one way to keep Tim from walking out on him. "I'll deal with you later," he told Wes.

Wes looked amused. Bastard. Now he was in even more trouble for not taking him seriously.

The elevator ride passed in silence. Colin didn't want to barrage Tim. He wasn't going to change his mind all at once, but Colin would wear him down. As they stood in the elevator, the vibe between them seemed a little better than when they went up. Maybe seeing Wes for himself eliminated some of Tim's worries.

In front of the diner, Colin stopped him before they went their separate ways.

"Where are you staying? Not with Brad?" Colin asked, frowning.

Tim gave him a sharp look at the mention of Brad. "James will put me up."

Colin nodded. He didn't want Tim trusting Brad again. If he wasn't staying with Brad, Tim must know something wasn't right. That was fine as long as he didn't find out too much and go after him.

Seeing that Tim was giving him a searching look, Colin told him, "Go get some sleep. I'll see you soon." He clapped him on the shoulder and went inside the diner. Through the diner windows, he watched Tim as he went to his old, crappy car.

Tim was always the solid one, the one person in the world Colin could count on since their parents died. But Colin remembered all the times he worried about Tim, kept things from him, did things just because Tim wanted him to. He wondered if they would ever be on equal footing. One day, he wanted to be able to talk to Tim without fear, without secrets, without holding back, the way he could talk to Wes.

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Wes wasn't sure Colin would come back with his brother in tow until he heard that knock on the door. When the brothers came in, he was struck by the resemblances and contrasts between them.

Colin's brother was a good-looking guy. If Wes hadn't seen Colin

first, he would have found Tim extremely attractive. But next to Colin, he just couldn't compare. Though both of them kept their jackets on, Wes could tell that Tim was more muscular though not as tall as his younger brother. His hair was dark and curly like Colin's but shorter so the curls didn't show as much. His features were rougher, his eyes not nearly as beguiling as Colin's. Tim's eyes had a guarded look that Wes was sure wasn't only meant for him. It was part of his nature. Wes saw no malice there though.

Though powerfully built, Tim was nothing like their uncle. That had been Wes's worry. Unlike their uncle, Tim was contained, completely under control. The temper Colin was worried about was like a coiled metal spring inside him clamped down tight.

Even when he approached Wes as if to provoke him, Wes saw no loss of control. If anything, he was testing Wes for his own faults. Tim was looking for signs of weakness or temper, anything that might hurt Colin or make Wes unworthy of him. Tim was rightly protective of his impulsive, younger brother.

Despite holding his ground, Wes knew that he could never make a good impression on Colin's brother. Colin didn't seem to know this. He had too much faith in both of them. Colin didn't have the cynicism to see Wes the way Tim did. For his part, Wes couldn't dislike Tim. He was unpleasant and abrasive, but he wasn't wrong. Wes wished he could think of him as some dumb meathead and dismiss him. In a way, he admired Colin's stoic older brother. Tim had taken on parental responsibilities and now he couldn't think of Colin as an adult.

To Wes's ears, everything Tim said might sound right, but it didn't sound right to Colin, his champion. Colin had his own unorthodox methods of fighting back. It was just like him to defuse the situation with something so very inappropriate. When Tim backed off and left, Wes could tell that he loved his little brother too much to go against him, but he still thought that Wes was scum.

That night Wes got to hear Colin's plan for dealing with Tim. They were sitting on the couch together with the TV muted.

"I'm going to see him tomorrow," Colin told him while he worked his way through a bag of potato chips.

"Are you sure you don't want to give him more time?" Wes said. Colin was relentless, but Wes wasn't sure it would serve him this time.

"Tim is my family. He can be pissed. He can disapprove if he wants. But he doesn't get to reject me, or turn his back on me, or any of that other shitty stuff," Colin said passionately, gesturing with the bag of potato chips. Wes took the bag away from him. "I'll lift some weights later," Colin told him. He lifted his sweatshirt to show him his trim abs.

Wes touched him there. He felt his hand heat up from the warmth of his skin. Colin gave him a salty kiss. When he pulled back, his eyes held no doubts. Wes knew he was seeing in him the same stubborn refusal to let go, to lose someone who was important to him that had driven Colin to keep coming after him. Colin was impulsive and pushy because he loved fiercely and without reservations.

"You see only good. Your brother was just being more realistic," Wes told him, trying to make him understand where Tim was coming from.

"Stop taking his side. Where is your fighting spirit?" Colin asked leaning toward him.

"Did you want us to go at each other tooth and claw?"

"That could be a video game. Cage match! Brother vs. Boyfriend. Round one! Pow!" Colin punched the air then he got serious again. "You stood up to my uncle. You slammed him into a building. You didn't need to get physical with Tim, but why didn't you stand up to him more?"

"Your uncle came after me out of hate. Tim did it out of love and concern for you," Wes explained. He couldn't imagine hurting someone who loved Colin and whom Colin loved so much.

"What are you a Tim fan?" Colin accused him.

"In a way. He looked after you, and he's still doing that."

"Well, he needs to stop."

"It's a big adjustment. You've been the focus of his life. You said he went to Canada to earn money so he could give you a home."

"Don't even think of using that as an excuse to kick me out," Colin said, ready to get angry with him.

"I want you to stay more than anything," Wes confessed.

"Forever?" Colin jumped in to say.

"Forever is longer than you think."

"Oh, is it? Call my bluff then, and I'll have you shackled to me for life." Colin leaned in and touched his forehead to Wes's.

"What kind of life. If I..."

"Stop," Colin said and put his arms around him. "You don't need to be so on your guard. I'll watch over you from now on and make sure you stay sane and mine forever." Colin kissed him, letting his body sink against Wes.

It was a good feeling to be with Colin and to have someone watching over him. Wes let himself live in that moment where Colin's lips were gliding over his and he was warmed by his body.

Chapter 19

Colin was antsy over his unresolved issues with Tim. That's why he had to see him tomorrow. If he could, he would be going to see him right this minute. Instead he went to bother that nocturnal creature he loved. His beloved creature was at his desk, working. At almost midnight, Colin didn't feel even a little bit guilty coming up behind him and interrupting him.

"I guess you're in the mood," Wes said feeling Colin's groping hands and pushing them away from his crotch.

"Tim is stressing me out," Colin told him as he nuzzled his neck. "Just so you know, a blowjob will not do. Fuck me or else. And don't even think of saying no. Do you know how much sex you owe me after rejecting me all this time? You're in debt to me to your eyeballs." Colin straightened so he could glare at Wes.

"Am I even in this conversation, or is this a monologue?" Wes asked.

"I don't need you for conversation. Strip!"

"Let me finish this, and I'll start repaying my debt to you," Wes told him.

Hearing his words, Colin felt a little deflated. "I'm not used to you being so willing and cooperative. I have a lot of fight left in me. I don't know what to do with that now."

"You should save your energy. You'll need it," Wes told him in a deep, sexy voice that made Colin's cock press against his zipper even harder.

Wes was right. Their last fuck had been exhausting, and that was with Wes taking it easy on him. He couldn't imagine what it would be like if Wes let himself go all out.

Since Wes was being good, Colin left him alone so he could work and went to wait for him in bed. Their bed. Mmm, that was a nice thought. Colin turned up the heat, stripped and got under the cold covers. He loved the feel of being there naked, warming the bed while waiting for Wes to fuck him.

Wes didn't keep him waiting long. Standing in the doorway, he gazed at Colin with a faint smile and a lustful gleam in his eyes.

Colin liked the idea that he hurried so he could come to him. Getting out of bed and showing Wes he was naked and already hard, Colin came over to him and kissed him.

Wes's hands went to his hips to hold him close. The feel of Wes's hardening cock made his insides tighten in anticipation. Colin's breath caught in his throat and he pulled away. Freed from his arms, Wes was about to take off his clothes, but Colin wanted to be the one to strip him.

Pulling open Wes's fly and pushing down the front of his boxers, Colin freed his already hard cock. That was like something from his dirtiest dreams. Colin was taking shuddering breaths thinking of it inside him.

"Oh, fuck," he said, helpless at the sight of it.

He hurriedly got Wes all the way naked and pushed him to sit on the bed. Lube and condoms were already there. Seeing them, Wes gave him a look.

"I was ready," Colin said.

As Colin climbed over him to straddle his lap, Wes embraced him and felt him up. Colin did the same to him. He loved the feel of Wes's firm, big muscled body. While Colin groped him, Wes pushed lubed fingers inside him. Colin fell forward, kissed his neck and moaned. He had to endure and enjoy the fingering until Wes decided it was enough. Trying to hurry him, Colin kissed Wes hungrily and pinched his nipples. Once Colin started grinding their cocks together and riding Wes's fingers at the same time, Wes finally stopped.

He leaned back, lying on the bed. Colin put his hands over Wes's and entwined their fingers together. Hovering over him, Colin looked into his eyes. He kissed Wes but not for long. Wes rolled them over to get on top. Then Wes folded him up and entered him with inhuman patience and restraint – the merciless bastard.

Colin felt like his whole being was stretching to allow Wes inside him. It wasn't easy, but it was easier than last time. This time there wasn't even a trace of fear. Colin knew what to expect – Wes loving him and making him feel amazing.

When Wes was all the way in, Colin's head rolled back, his eyes too. Wes stopped, letting him feel the cock deep inside him and nothing else. His cock was thick and rock-hard so far up inside him,

he could taste it.

Wes pressed into him with the weight of his whole body like he wanted to go deeper when there was no deeper. The rocking of his hips was in tune with Colin's harsh, rapid breathing. Wes moved inside him with effort and care, and Colin loved him for it even as he urged him to pound his ass.

He was gliding his fingers over every inch of Wes's body he could reach. His fingertips tingled from the feel of Wes's skin stretched tight over big muscles. Colin loved feeling the power of his body, his muscles working under his hands. His hands were in constant motion, touching Wes everywhere. It wasn't only Wes's cock he wanted. He wanted all of him, to possess every inch.

Feeling Wes move under his hands as he pumped in and out of him was intoxicating. It was too much. Colin was already out of his mind. He couldn't take any more good feelings coming at him, tearing him apart, blowing his mind.

Colin sobbed with need then laughed. He was grappling for a handhold on Wes's sweat slick body. Clutching at him desperately, Colin wanted more of him than he could grasp. His whole body rose off the bed to meet his thrusts. With Wes's next thrust, an orgasm crashed through him. It had him arching his back, his muscles pulled tight. Then it slammed him down into quivering, moaning bliss.

Slowing down his thrusts, Wes said, "I love you."

Grabbing Wes's hips, Colin kept him moving. He pushed Wes harder and faster into him so he could come too and share his high. This time it was Colin's turn to say "I love you" as Wes came. It was wonderful to hear those words, to know the meaning of what they did. Colin knew that's why it felt so good with Wes and that no one else could do this to him.

Wes lowered his head and took Colin's mouth with his. It was a deep, all consuming kiss. Colin already felt like he was burning up inside. Wes's mouth only made him hotter. Having Wes's body on top of him felt so good, but it wasn't helping him cool down. Feeling him start to get hard again, Wes rolled off to the side then out of bed.

"I'm just turning down the heat," Wes told him and came right back.

Colin assured both himself and Wes that he wasn't clingy. Sighing,

he burrowed into Wes like he could dig his way into his body. But he wasn't clingy. He just couldn't get enough of Wes.

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Wes woke up with Colin's crotch pressed into his hip and Colin's legs entwined with his. When he tried to move, Colin wrapped himself around him possessively but continued to sleep. That felt nice, but Wes was incapable of staying in bed after 6:00AM. He used just a little bit of his strength to extricate himself from Colin. Colin growled at him. His eyes snapped opened and glared hard at Wes.

"Are you trying to escape?"

Wes laughed helplessly and let Colin pull him back into bed and into his embrace. He was so completely his prisoner, body, mind and most of all his heart. He blew Colin slowly until he had him cursing and begging to come. Wes could feel the orgasm melt through Colin and pour out of him, his to swallow.

Making Colin come was an incredible experience. Because of Colin, Wes had a new awareness of his body and how much pleasure it could give and take. He had only known sex without love. Being with Colin was like nothing he had ever experienced. He never knew sex could reach your soul, obliterate you, and make you whole.

Until now, Wes couldn't have imagined how much he didn't know about love. And to think that Colin was his teacher. Colin carried love inside him, brought it to him, and hit him with it. In Colin's hands, love was a sledgehammer. It smashed everything in its way. Wes could almost believe that it could overcome any obstacle.

Chapter 20

That morning Colin gave up precious time he could have used to grind against Wes, and instead went to go see Tim. He hoped Tim appreciated it. James' place wasn't within walking distance so Colin borrowed Wes's car and drove the poor, neglected Explorer for the first time in God knows how long.

James' place was practically in the woods. It was more like a shack than a house. The gray paneled box was tucked away on the edge of a narrow forest that edged the highway on the other side. There were a few other houses scattered around, out of sight. The peaceful, sheltered spot was kind of nice if you didn't mind so much nature and no people. For someone like Tim, it was probably perfect. It was just his luck that James got dumped by his girlfriend. She moved out and Tim was in.

Colin parked next to Tim's wreck of a car where a space had been shoveled clear of snow. That meant James had gone to work and Tim was still there. Colin braced himself for the cold and got out.

Snow was thick on the evergreens, clumped on the branches. The white of snow was too pure here, not the dirty snow of busy streets. Snowdrifts were high, changing the shape of the landscape, rewriting it but only until the weather got warmer and put the world back the way it was supposed to be, green, not white.

The noise from the highway was an indistinct hum. In the quiet, Colin was startled when a branch, heavy with snow, gave under its weight and the snow crashed down. The branch swayed while Colin watched it. Once it stopped, the place returned to its unnatural stillness.

This place seemed right for Tim and his buddy, James. James was an OK guy, closemouthed like Tim. They probably wouldn't say two words to each other for days. Well, Colin was there to make up for it. Going up to the door, he knocked and waited for someone to open up. If Tim had gone into town with James, and Colin drove there for nothing, he was going to be very pissed.

He could have called before coming over, but that's not how it was between them. Colin planned to spend the rest of his life dropping in

on Tim whenever the hell he felt like it. And he expected the same from Tim. Colin was going to be in Tim's life up to his eyeballs. When Tim got married, Colin was going to make an embarrassing toast. When Tim had kids, Colin was going to teach them how to drive Tim up the wall. And when he and Wes had kids, Colin was going to teach them how to drive Tim up the wall too. Colin planned to make himself a permanent nuisance in Tim's life. The first step in his plan was to fight through whatever was standing between them now.

Though he was sure that Tim would get past it, Colin still hated that Tim disapproved and even more that he might think less of him. He just had to show him that his relationship with Wes was based on love, that no one was using anyone or being used. If only he knew how to convince Tim that this was a good thing.

Tim opened the door and gave a weary sigh on seeing him.

"Nice to see you too," Colin told him and walked in out of the cold and into the cold. "It's freezing in here."

"It's plenty warm from cooking breakfast," Tim claimed.

Like hell it was, but it did smell good – fried eggs and kielbasa, James' specialty. Aside from the stove, Colin knew the place had two portable heaters. One was in the living room, and it was off. The couch in there had a pillow and a pile of blankets on it. That's where Tim slept. There was a bedroom and a bathroom, both tiny. He and Tim had stayed at James' for a little while before the girlfriend moved in. Tim slept on the floor then.

"I'm fine on the floor. You'll spend all day bitching about it," Tim had told him when he let him have the couch. That's the kind of brother he was. And that's why Colin wasn't going to let anything get between them.

Colin went over to turn on the heater and stood with his back to it. With his arms folded, he faced Tim and asked, "So how much of this is about me being gay and how much is about my boyfriend being a few years older than me?"

"A few years?" Tim said.

"How old is the guy you're living with?" Colin asked since James was only a little younger than Wes.

"I'm not sleeping with James."

"I don't know that," Colin told him flatly. "But never mind about that now. If you have a problem with me being gay, I want to address that first. And I'll be doing that by telling you where you can shove it. I'll draw you a map and everything."

Tim waited patiently for Colin to shut up then he told him, "You've been gay for as long as I've known you. I don't give a fuck about that."

Colin was a little taken aback. "I only figured it out a few years ago. How long have you known?"

"Since you were little and you kissed and hugged every boy you could get your hands on."

Colin kind of remembered that. "I was just friendly! And why didn't you say something?"

"You expected me to tell you that you were gay?"

"You could have mentioned it. I was ready to marry Suzie Polder."

"When you were five?"

When Colin was five, Suzie Polder lived in the apartment across the hall from them. The only reason they didn't tie the knot was because she moved.

"We were this close to taking our vows. When they asked if anyone knew of any reason why these two should not be married, were you just going to stand by while I made the biggest mistake of my life?"

Tim rubbed his head in frustration. "Is it possible to have a normal, adult, human conversation with you?"

"What are you talking about? You know me. No!"

"You're giving me a fucking headache," Tim said, pressing the palms of his hands into his temples.

"I've been giving you a fucking headache all my life. You should be used to it by now." Colin let Tim gnash his teeth for a few seconds then moved on to the other thorny issue. "I want you to stop thinking of Wes as the bad guy."

"You need to move out of there," Tim said like he thought there was an ice cube's chance in hell of that happening.

"And do what?" Colin said.

"We can stay here for a while."

Colin looked around the drab space that was barely fit for one

person. "Sounds cozy. But I'd rather get cozy with Wes."

"You don't know what the hell you're doing," Tim said, shaking his head.

"Thanks for the vote of confidence. I know I haven't done great taking care of myself..." Colin started to say.

"Is that why you're with him?"

"No! Wes is my boyfriend not my sugardaddy."

"You don't need him. You have family."

That last part was good to hear, but it wasn't enough for Colin any more. He wasn't going to give up Wes for anything or anyone.

"I want to have a brother and a boyfriend," he told Tim.

"He's not your boyfriend. He's using you."

"For what? What exactly am I good for?"

"You want me to spell it out?" Tim asked.

"Would you?" Colin challenged him.

Tim said nothing.

"You mean he's after my hot, young ass," Colin said since Tim wasn't willing to. "Ha! You and him might not know it, but Wes can have any man he wants. I'm just lucky he's a hermit, or I would never be able to get him without fighting off an army of man skanks. Wes is my man. You can like it or love it. Those are your choices."

"Me not punching his face through the back of his skull. Is that one of the choices?" Tim asked though he hadn't even come close to doing that when he met him.

"I'm calling that one 'In your dreams, little bro.' Maybe you didn't notice when you were eye to chin with him, but I didn't pick a weakling. If he can kick Uncle Hal's ass, then he can, at the very least, hold his own with you."

"Uncle Hal?"

"Fuck," Colin said. He didn't mean to tell Tim about that.

"More stuff you're keeping from me," Tim said. His face was twice as grim now.

"Keep a lid on your temper and I won't have to."

"How did he find you?" Tim wondered. "I assume you didn't tell him where you were working or living."

Colin sighed. "He must have heard something. People come into the diner all the time," Colin said. He didn't want to mention Brad

though he was pretty sure he was the one who tattled on him to Uncle Hal.

"If he comes near you again, you need to call me," Tim told him in a gruff voice.

"So you can drive down here from Canada?"

"I won't be in Canada," Tim said, surprising him.

"Aren't you going back? I thought after the holidays..."

"Like hell."

"You're staying here to babysit me!" Colin accused him, but then he smiled. "OK. Good. You're a pain in the ass, but I like having you around."

Colin just kept grinning at him and Tim shook his head.

After grudgingly making him some coffee, Tim talked to him about Canada and his plans to find work. They didn't discuss Wes any more, but the subject hung between them. When it was time for Colin to go to work, Tim walked him to Wes's car. He looked it over like he didn't need a test-drive to tell him there was something wrong with it. The only thing wrong with it was that it belonged to Wes.

Tim just couldn't believe that Colin and Wes were meant to be. Well, Wes was pretty hard to convince too. They weren't as different as Tim thought. Both Tim and Wes had protective, caring instincts. They were tough on the outside, soft and mushy inside. Colin grinned at the thought. That was a good way to be in his book. No wonder he fell for Wes so hard.

Next day Colin wasn't going to work so he woke up feeling extra cheerful that morning. His day off was his chance to get his full dose of Wes. This late, he didn't find Wes next to him in bed though.

Colin made himself clean and minty fresh then went in search of his prey. There he was in the exercise room, Colin's former bedroom. Wes was putting on quite a show. Sitting on the exercise bench, he was doing biceps curls. Slowly, Wes moved the weight in toward his body. His biceps flexed so enticingly. Colin had to go over and put his hands on him.

"Mmm," Colin said closing his eyes.

"Can I exercise without you groping me?" Wes asked.

"No," Colin answered. Why would he even ask that?

Colin kept his hand on Wes's arm feeling the skin tighten, the muscle grow and harden. He ran his other hand over his chest. There was good stuff happening there too.

Wes stood up and alternated two weights, one in each hand. Colin stood close to his chest, out of the way. He groped Wes all over while Wes gave him a look that would have sent any other man running. The look was pure intimidation, and it was a total bluff. Wes was so hot.

"That look tells me I've been bad. Do you want to punish me?"

"Never."

"Pushover. You should be punished. You are supposed to be saving all your energy for me. I'm owed some strenuous sexual activity."

"You're not exercise."

"Then I'm doing it wrong."

Wes set down the weights and went to lie on the exercise mat.

"Now we're talking," Colin said, ready to climb on top of him but mesmerized by his body bending as he did crunches. "Are you doing this so you'll look extra hot for me?" Colin teased him, standing over him and smirking.

"Make yourself useful. Hold my legs down," Wes said.

"Only if you take your shirt off," Colin said as he kneeled by his feet.

Wes sighed and then he did it. Colin took a firm hold of his legs. He also grinned at Wes.

"I can't focus if you're smirking at me," Wes told him.

"I can't help it. You look amazing. Look at you. You're sex and then more sex. You want to fuck?"

"Might as well since you won't let me exercise in peace," Wes said and started getting up.

Colin jumped up, slapped his hands together and pumped his fist into the air. Then he noticed that Wes was leaving the room.

"Where are you going? I want to do it here." He showed him the condoms and lube he stashed under the mattress when this was his bedroom.

"I want to take a shower," Wes said and just kept going.

Colin followed him. "No way. Get your hot, sweaty ass back here." He grabbed him just before he got into the bathroom and sniffed him. This was exactly what a guy should smell like, a little clean a little dirty and all man. "They should bottle you," he told Wes and kissed him. He tried to drag him to the bed, but Wes wouldn't budge.

"A shower is not negotiable," Wes said.

"Then I want to watch," Colin said and followed him into the bathroom.

"Seriously?" Wes said like he didn't understand the appeal.

"What? You wouldn't want to watch me shower?"

Wes only grumbled in answer. He got him there.

"This is embarrassing," Wes said as he stripped and got into the shower. Water cascaded over him in rivulets. Colin wanted to drink them up.

"It's sexy as hell. Now do your thing. Soap up real good." Of course Colin made a dick-stroking motion.

After just watching for a little bit, Colin couldn't help himself. He got his clothes off and got in the shower. He soaped up his hands and had them all over Wes. His cock got special attention until it went for semi hard to rock-hard. While being washed so thoroughly, Wes didn't keep his hands to himself. He soapy hands were on Colin's chest then down his back. Colin raised his face for a kiss and wondered how long before they ran out of hot water. Before that happened, he was up against the sink, dripping wet, with Wes's cock entering him slowly. This was the life.

Chapter 21

Saturdays Colin went to his job a little earlier to help with the extra work. Wes decided it was a good day to have lunch at the diner. He tried to do that at least once a week. Sometimes Colin could even sit down with him to eat. Wes didn't want to go without seeing him until late at night. As he walked to Penny's, Wes saw a girl hovering outside. A colorful, knit cap covered her red hair so Wes didn't recognize her at first. Becky was peering anxiously into the diner until she spotted Wes then she gasped.

"I think I screwed up," she said before Wes had a chance to greet her. "I think I spilled some beans I shouldn't have spilled."

"About?" Wes prompted her.

She pursed her lips like she didn't want to say. Then she took a deep breath. "I was partying last night with some friends, and there was Tim looking all gorgeous. The club was hot so he was wearing a short sleeved shirt. His arms... Oh, my God. You know what I'm saying." She took another deep breath. "I was talking to him, and I wasn't exactly clean and sober, you know. I might have told Tim how his good buddy, Brad, tried to pimp out his little brother. Do you think Colin is going to be mad? Do you think he's going to kill me dead?"

Wes ignored her question. "What did Tim do after you told him?"

"Oh, nothing. He said he was going to murder Brad, but he was pretty drunk so Lenny and Nando could handle him. They got him to sit back down and then they got him even drunker. They pretty much carried him home. He might not even remember what I told him," Becky said hopefully.

Wes wasn't going to count on that. In fact it might even be too late, but he still asked Becky if she knew where Brad lived.

With directions to Brad's apartment building, but no apartment number, Wes drove over there. He had already texted Colin that he was going to come over for lunch. Now he texted him to say he got busy and couldn't make it. Wes did have his hands full so it wasn't technically a lie. Fearing that it was too late, Wes didn't want Colin in the middle of an ugly scene.

Standing in front of the doors to Brad's apartment building, Wes was sure that he was wasting his time there. By now, Tim must have been there and gone. Wes did have a small hope. If Tim was as drunk last night as Becky said, he might not have gotten up with the sun. In that case, Wes might still be in time to stop him.

An old, dented, beige Chrysler parked down the block, jumping the curb. Wes watched Tim get out, looking as wrecked as his car. He spotted Wes right away. Standing at the main entrance to the building, Wes had made himself an obvious obstacle. Tim approached him as if he meant to barrel right through him if he had to.

It was Wes's policy not to lay hands on anyone unless they made it absolutely necessary. He followed that rule even as Tim came at him but stopped just inches short of colliding with him. Facing down Wes as he blocked the door, Tim still looked like he might headbutt him, but he only glared furiously at him.

"You're protecting him?" Tim said through gritted teeth. His jaw looked like it would snap. His eyes were bloodshot.

"I'm protecting you. I'd rather not have to drive Colin to visit you in jail after you make a bloody mess of your former best friend," Wes told him evenly. "And I especially don't want to watch Colin being eaten alive by guilt because of it." He didn't expect anything he said to change Tim's mind, not about Wes or about what he wanted to do to Brad. Wes fully expected to have to stop him physically so he was surprised when Tim stepped back. Watching him closely, Wes wondered if it was some kind of ploy.

Seeing the surprise and mistrust on his face, Tim told him, "I might look like I have shit for brains, but I can do my own math on this deal. So you can get the fuck out of my way." Tim pushed past him not to go up to Brad's but heading back down the street to his car.

Wes looked after him, still in shock. He didn't understand what kind of man Tim was, but really all that mattered was that he was Colin's brother.

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As Colin was carrying away a load of dirty dishes, he watched

Becky poking her nose against the diner window, looking for him and smudging the glass.

"Get in here already," Colin mouthed to her and waved her inside.

She came in reluctantly, and Colin wondered what was up with her. Then it all spilled out, and Colin was out the door, his apron still on, his jacket in his hand. He barely had time to yell over his shoulder for Becky to tell his boss he had an emergency. He didn't want to get fired on top of all the other shit that was hitting the fan.

He ran to Brad's carrying with him the sick feeling that he was too late. Brad wasn't exactly a weakling, but he couldn't take on Tim and hold his own, especially Tim on a rampage. Colin could already picture Brad beaten to a bloody pulp and Tim in handcuffs.

The thing he didn't expect to see was Wes in front of Brad's apartment building. He was about to get into his car. Out of breath, Colin ran up to him, too winded to speak.

The first thing Wes said to him was "Button your jacket. Everything is fine."

"How?" Colin managed to say.

"Tim changed his mind," Wes said, leaving out his part in it. "He left a few minutes ago. You just missed him."

Colin knew Wes must have talked him down but not how he managed it. He hugged Wes in gratitude.

"How did you know?" Colin asked.

"Becky told me."

"She didn't tell me that," Colin said, even more angry with her now. "I should have known better than to bitch to Becky about Brad."

As Wes drove him back to work, he told Colin that he didn't think Tim would go after Brad again. "Your brother might be smarter than you think."

Colin couldn't bank on that though. He had to see Tim for himself.

"I wish I could ditch work and go hunt him down," Colin said.

"Your brother is hung over and mad. And not only at Brad," Wes reminded him.

"I know. I guess I can see him tomorrow."

Wes didn't look thrilled about that plan either.

Early the next morning, Colin was back at the door of James' house. Tim yanked the door open and pulled him inside.

"Take it easy," Colin told him as he went to turn on the heater.

"Is anything that ever comes out of your mouth not a lie?!" Tim yelled.

"Lots of stuff. Think of the sheer volume. It can't all be lies."

"You think this is a time to joke?" Tim said stepping up to him, right in his face.

Colin only straightened up to his full height and smirked at him. "That maneuver just makes you look short," Colin told him. "And since when am I afraid of you? That's right, little bro. Since never."

Tim stepped back only a little. He wasn't the only one who could get tough though.

Colin gave him a hard, searching stare then he spoke. "Now what I want to hear from you is that you're done with Brad as a friend and as a target for your rage."

"He isn't the one you should be worrying about," Tim said. "When do you think you might be done keeping things from me?"

"When you're done flying off the handle and treating me like I'm a kid," Colin shot back at him.

"You almost let Brad pimp you out." Tim had a sick, angry look on his face.

"The hell I did! I didn't even consider it."

"And you didn't say a word about it to me. You didn't tell me about Uncle Hal either. You didn't tell me you were on the street or that you were living with that Wes guy."

"Isn't he awesome?" Colin said.

Tim looked like he might deck him, but Colin wasn't fooled.

"Don't be so dense. You want to protect me, but you don't understand why I would want to protect you?" Colin was serious now. "Ever since Mom died, you've been going overboard trying to take care of me. That has to stop. I love you, but I'm living my life now the way I want. I'll be taking care of myself and kicking your ass if you try to boss me around."

Tim looked at him with a pained expression, and Colin hugged him. "Don't cry, little bro," he said.

"Shut up," Tim said pushing him off. He tried to look furious, but

failed miserably. "Is your ability to be serious two minutes tops?" he asked Colin.

"If that. Unless I'm denied sex. Then I can hold a grudge like nobody's business."

"Shut up," Tim said, but Colin could tell that a lot of anger had gone out of him. It looked like Wes was right, and Tim was smarter than Colin gave him credit for.

Chapter 22

The next time Colin went to visit Tim, he had a different mission. "I'm inviting you for Christmas dinner at my boyfriend's place."

"That almost makes it sound like I have a choice," Tim grumbled.

"I'm glad you weren't fooled. No one is giving you a choice. I'm just telling you where you'll be on Christmas."

"You won't be cooking, right?"

"I've heard that phrase too many times now," Colin said.

"For a damn good reason," Tim told him.

Colin also went to invite Becky. She had texted him a million sorrys. Colin just told her to keep them coming.

"Does that mean you forgive me?" she said when he asked her to come for Christmas dinner.

"No." It wouldn't do to go easy on her. Inviting her over for Christmas was a way of letting her know that she would eventually be forgiven, but not yet.

"I can't go anyway. I have to have Christmas with Mom and the dogs. She'll have them in Santa hats and reindeer antlers. It'll be all yip yip, yip yip," she said, doing an uncanny impression of the dogs.

Sitting on the floor on Christmas morning, Colin tore into his gifts like an animal. Colin's parents were very strict about waiting to open presents Christmas morning. When he was a kid, it killed Colin to wait even though he slept through most of the waiting. Now he kept up the tradition.

"Did you buy me every electronic device in existence?" Colin said seeing the amazing gifts Wes got him. Colin had gotten him shirts and sweaters that weren't gray, or navy, or black.

"I'm officially your boyfriend now. It's my sworn duty," Wes told him. He was wearing his new bright blue sweater and looking gorgeous.

"You didn't need to buy me all this. You should have just stripped and tied a gift ribbon to your dick."

"You're welcome." Wes leaned down and kissed him.

"You are the biggest, best Christmas gift anyone could ever give me, and I mean all of you, not just your cock," Colin told him.

Later on when they started dinner, Wes told Colin that he hadn't had a Christmas dinner since he was in college. That made Colin wish they had a bigger crowd coming. Other than Tim, only Pete was joining them. His parents were having dinner with friends and that left him free.

Wes was in charge of cooking, but Colin had outdone himself making the apartment festive and bright. No one would recognize it as Wes's former cave. Garlands were hung by Colin without care and then straightened by Wes. The tree was small and ready to fall over from all the tinsel. Tinsel was cool. Colin had it everywhere.

"I'll be vacuuming up this stuff for months," Wes said.

"I did what I had to," Colin told him. He pointed around at all the black furniture. It took a lot of tinsel to turn that around.

Wes was doing his part though. He was busy glazing a ham with some kind of boozy, maple syrup mixture and otherwise making the apartment smell amazing.

They were still getting things ready when Tyson and Lau stopped by to drop off presents. When he saw the decorations, Tyson looked at Colin like he had committed a crime. He and Lau were hitting several parties and get-togethers that night so they couldn't stay for dinner.

"Are you sure that's not the kind of thing you would rather do?" Wes asked Colin after they left.

"I didn't make this place all festive and awesome so I could run around. I did it for us to have the best Christmas ever," Colin told him.

The next to arrive was Pete. He took a big lungful of the cooking smell and demanded a beer. Unlike some people, he appreciated Colin's decorating style. Tim did not. When he arrived and saw the state of the place, he looked ready to turn around and leave.

"Get in here and meet Pete," Colin said, dragging him into the living room.

Pete gave Tim a look similar to the one he gave Colin when he first met him. The result was a little different. Once the introductions

were made, Pete slung his arm over Colin's shoulders.

"I'm part of the threesome. I'm Colin's boyfriend too. Wes and I are sharing him, taking turns," Pete said, keeping a straight face.

Colin immediately placed himself between Pete and Tim.

With his back to Tim, he told Pete, "Dude, your sense of humor is going to get you killed."

"As I've told you many, many times," Wes said. He also must have told him that Tim disapproved of their relationship, and now Pete was sticking up for him in his own way.

Under the threat of impending death, Pete just grinned behind all that beard. He looked over Colin's shoulder at Tim. "Guys like your brother have been beating me up since grade one. I'm not about to start being afraid of them now."

"Tim never beat up on nerds. Right, little bro?" Colin said.

"Right, but I might make an exception for Chewbacca over there and maybe you too if you keep calling me little bro," he said to Colin.

"You're in a festive mood," Wes told him as he handed both him and Pete a beer.

"Cheer up. Pete isn't even gay. See how much you have in common," Colin told Tim.

"Yeah. The not gay should keep us talking for hours," Tim grumbled.

Actually Pete didn't need encouragement to get him going. He talked Tim's ear off about his dad's knee surgery and then about his work. He also had some ideas about where Tim might find a job.

While they talked, Colin helped Wes get food on the table. Seeing how much of it there was and how little he had to do with it, Colin complained. "You didn't let me cook one thing. You only let me peel and stir."

"I didn't think it would be fair to our guests to subject them to your practice attempts at cooking."

"You are a bad boyfriend!"

"As for myself, I would rather have the most awful thing you made me than the best meal I ever had," Wes told him.

"OK," Colin said, grudgingly accepting his peace offering.

"Is that love or what?" Pete said to Tim. Colin wasn't sure if he was

taunting him or if he was being sincere.

Tim mumbled something in response.

"What's that?" Colin asked him.

"I don't know if it's love, but it's something because you can't cook for shit."

"I was worried you were insulting Wes, but you were insulting me," Colin said as they took seats around the table.

With Colin and Pete busy chewing, there were a few silent moments during dinner. The rest were filled with embarrassing stories as the two of them tried to outdo each other. They started out trying to embarrass Tim and Wes, but they quickly ran out of material. It came down to telling their own most embarrassing moments, none of them appropriate for the dinner table.

When Tim was full of ham and ready to go, Colin went to the elevator with him. He was so happy that he could give his brother a real Christmas dinner.

"Did we put on a great Christmas or what?" Colin prompted him as Tim pressed the elevator button.

"It was fine."

"Fine? I saw you putting away half that ham. If Pete wasn't giving you a run for your money, it would have been more."

"The ham was good."

"And the guy who made it is even better."

"I'll give Wes credit for his cooking, and I'll give him a medal for being able to stand you running your mouth nonstop."

"Why is everyone saying that?" Colin said.

"Why do you think, blabbermouth?" Tim said and got into the elevator.

Colin smiled at him as the doors closed. He got one of Tim's guarded smiles in return.

Calling him a blabbermouth, Tim sent him right back to his childhood. Both Mom and Dad had called him their little blabbermouth for as long as he could remember. That and having a real Christmas dinner with Tim brought back memories of all the times their parents watched them open presents. Colin remembered their expressions as they pretended some awful thing he or Tim gave

them was just wonderful.

On every occasion, Colin had always tried to be the center of attention, and Tim always let him. Tim had been doing things for him all his life. Tonight he came over to have Christmas with him. Now Colin had even more faith in him. He might already be coming around about Wes. After all Wes was so sensible and uptight, how could Tim not like him? Colin hoped that Tim was a little bit closer to seeing that, to Colin, Wes was home and love, everything people live for.

Chapter 23

A few days before New Year's, a phone call from Tim got things off to a good start. He was starting a new job after the first of the year. Colin was thrilled to hear that Tim had a job. Even better, Pete had helped him get it. It turned out that Pete's dad had been laying tile all his life. That's how he messed up his knees, not playing football in his younger days as Colin had imagined. Pete's dad owned his own tile installation company. He just had a few guys working for him, and now Tim was one of them. To thank Pete for his help, Colin vowed to buy him as much beer as he could drink.

On that happy note, Colin was ready to make plans for New Year's. He was hoping Wes might come up with something, but he just wanted to stay home and celebrate quietly. Celebrate New Year's quietly like two old men – fat chance! That's why it was up to Colin to plan an obnoxious, noisy New Year's Eve for the two of them.

"We have to go to the Zoo."

Wes looked confused.

"You better be pretending not to know that I mean Club Zoo."

Wes smiled. He was pretending. Colin was both annoyed and relieved.

"They go all out. It's crazy. I went last year. My ears were ringing, I was seeing spots for a week. It was like staring at the sun. It was awesome. What do you say?"

"You are giving me a choice?" Wes asked.

"Only about this. Don't get used to it," Colin warned him, but then he got more earnest. "I don't want to drag you over there if you don't want to go. I don't want you to have a miserable New Year's."

"It can't be miserable if it's with you. We can go anywhere you want," Wes told him.

"OK." Colin clapped his hands together then hugged Wes. "We won't stay if you hate it."

"I remember you once promised you would dance for me," Wes said.

"It's on!" Colin said and grinned at him. "But I'm changing that to dance with you. Just one dance," he added seeing the look on Wes's

face. He didn't mean it though. They were going to dance their asses off all night.

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Wes wasn't sure if their New Year's Eve would be something he would just have to endure or if he would be able to enjoy himself. The sight of Colin in jeans that showed off his ass and a tight t-shirt was his answer. Colin by his side was all Wes needed to have a good time.

That was true even as they struggled to find parking and then had to wait a long time to get in. Zoo was packed. That gave Colin the excuse to maintain full body contact at all times. He also shot threatening glances at anyone who looked at Wes even in passing. Wes knew he didn't need to be defended so strenuously, but Colin didn't. He believed Wes was a prize every man there wanted to take away from him. The combination of possessiveness and pride in Wes was flattering even if it was completely wrongheaded.

The club was just as loud and bright as Colin promised, but the longer they were there the more Wes felt like the two of them were there alone. The happy, animated crowd flowed around them. In each other's arms, Wes and Colin might be bumped and jostled, but they were not disturbed. The people around them seemed as anonymous and unconcerned with them as the sea. Even if the sea of people carried them far away, Colin and Wes only had eyes for each other. They danced only for each other and kissed as much as they wanted.

The lights flashed, the music throbbed, but the most dazzling thing there was Colin. Wes was so lost in him that the countdown to midnight caught him by surprise. He felt a heightening of excitement with every second. He hadn't felt that way since he was a kid. Over the years, the arrival of a new year had lost its magic. Colin brought so much into his life that Wes could even believe that a new year was an adventure filled with new possibilities. At midnight Colin shouted I love you. The words reached Wes only faintly, but they already filled his heart. The shouting and cheers drowned out everything but what mattered most – Colin in his arms, kissing him

until he couldn't breathe.

They came home drunk on each other and nearly deaf. Colin started stripping him as soon as they were through the door. He had kissed him during the elevator ride and groped him the whole drive over.

Now he smashed his mouth into Wes's, moaning into the kiss. When Colin stopped to breathe, Wes told him, "I love you. Happy New Year." He had been so lost in Colin when the clock struck midnight that he hadn't said it.

Colin only nodded, said a quick I love you back and went back to kissing him. Their clothes lay wherever Colin threw them from the front door into the living room. They were standing naked together, wrapped around each other. Colin's hands clawed Wes's back, clutched at his hair, whatever it took to hold him close. Passion consumed them both. Wes pressed Colin to him like he would crush him. After so many lonely years, Colin was a treasure to him, one he never expected to find.

"I worship you," Wes gasped, trying to express the overwhelming feeling inside him.

"Now you're just mocking me," Colin accused him.

"I'm not. I mean it."

Outside the windows, against the black sky, the last of the fireworks were going off. Wes felt like they were going off inside him. His whole body cried out for Colin, and his heart only beat in his name.

"I think I like love better than worship," Colin said.

"I just love you so much I don't know how to describe the feeling," Wes told him as he kissed his neck.

"Don't bother. That's what sex is for. Show me." Colin lunged at him for a deep, demanding kiss.

The impact of his body was harder than Wes anticipated. He barely kept them both upright.

"And now you're attacking me," Wes said when Colin pulled back to stare into his eyes.

"It's a love attack. You did this to me. It's your responsibility to satisfy me until I can't walk." Colin groped Wes and walked him

backwards into the bedroom. "Why am I the rough one?" he asked, looking puzzled.

"You're asking me?" Wes said as Colin shoved lube into his hands.

"It's your fault. You drive me to it. I'm like an animal around you," Colin said then he kissed him softly for a long time as if to prove that wasn't all there was to him.

Soft or rough, Colin could do no wrong in his eyes. Everything about him made Wes want him more – his restlessness, his need, his demands, his naked love for him which Wes wanted to return a thousand times. For now he would do as he asked and show him. As Wes sank into him, Colin was hot and alive under him, drenched in sweat and unimaginably beautiful. Fucking him as hard as he dared, Wes felt like he could go on like this forever, united with Colin, striving with him until heaven opened up and spilled over them.

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When Colin asked Wes to show him his love, he fulfilled his demand completely. Pushing Colin down on the bed, Wes covered him with his body. Colin moaned at the weight of his big body on top of him. Wes kissed his way down to his cock, but he sucked him only long enough to get him to writhe and pant with need.

Releasing his cock, Wes rubbed the stubble of his cheek against Colin's inner thigh. From there, Wes worked his way up to his mouth slowly. His tongue was everywhere. His teeth were on Colin's nipples. Every nerve of Colin's body was on fire. Then Wes kissed him deep and slow as he fingered him, getting him ready and driving him out of his mind. Needy and impatient, Colin climbed on top of him as soon as he had a condom on Wes. Wes flipped him over on his back in one powerful motion. Colin laughed with surprise.

"Hey!" he protested.

"I don't trust you to behave," Wes told him bluntly, and he was right. Colin was ready to ride him for all he was worth, slam down, take the pain and the pleasure and love him to death if Wes let him.

"You make me crazy," Colin told him.

Wes only smiled down at him and pushed the head of his cock inside him. Colin felt love and ecstasy rushing through him as Wes

drove his cock deeper all the time. With every shuddering breath Colin took, he was asking for more. The final shove that filled him to the limit merged with the next with no pause. Wes's strong grip held him still for a hard pounding.

Colin didn't know Wes could fuck like this, with a relentless rolling of his hips that plunged his cock deep and shook Colin's bones. Trembling and incoherent as the force of each thrust took him higher, Colin wanted to live in this moment forever, thoroughly fucked, wrecked, owned. His need to come was building in him like an earthquake. Then it overwhelmed him completely. The orgasm burst through him hot and destructive as if it would demolish everything inside him. Good thing Wes was there, joining with him and making him whole.

Wes had dropped next to him, breathing hard. Not wanting to lose the connection between them, Colin flung an arm and a leg over him possessively. Soon the air in the bedroom started to seem a little cold against his naked skin. Colin pressed himself against Wes and pulled the covers over both of them. Drawing him closer, Wes smelled his hair and shifted so there was even more contact between them. Colin purred against his chest. What a perfect way to start a new year.

"Satisfied?" Wes asked, noticing his mood.

"Never," Colin said but he certainly felt content. He raised his head and touched his lips to Wes's. Their kiss was slow and intense.

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Never having gone to sleep, they watched dawn break through the windows. They held each other close as the bedroom filled with silvery blue light. It was a new day and a new year, and Wes felt that his life was only beginning. In his arms, Colin was solid and strong, ready for anything. He was fearless and beautiful.

"You're like a storm. You're the disruption and chaos I've been craving all my life but couldn't let myself taste," Wes said, speaking into Colin's curly hair.

Colin raised his head from his chest to look up at him. "I don't want my love to be like a wrecking ball. I want to be a good thing in your life."

"You are my life. I wasn't even alive before you. I never imagined anyone like you was out there for me."

Colin got even closer and wrapped Wes tighter in his arms. "I wasn't looking for you either. I was just looking for a place to sleep. I had no dream, no thought that a guy like you even existed or that he was meant for me. I stumbled across you. I stole your heart, and you stole mine, and I'm never letting you go." As he squeezed him tighter to emphasize his point, Colin's luminous eyes looked deep inside him. Wes felt like Colin could reach right inside him break him, fix him, do anything he wanted. Slowly they leaned toward each other for a kiss.

Too soon, Colin pulled away to frown at him and scold him. "You really made me work for it, but you'll have plenty of time to make it up to me. The rest of our lives should do it."

Wes wondered if he knew what he was saying.

"And if I lose my mind one day?"

"Haven't you already? Isn't that why I am here?" Colin asked with a smile.

"I'm serious."

"It will be OK," Colin said turning solemn. "That's why the vows say in sickness and in health."

That might have been too serious.

"I wasn't talking about vows," Wes said as his breath caught in his throat.

"I was," Colin said with a grin. "After a fuck like that, you ruined me for all other men. You have to marry me."

If Colin kept saying things like that, Wes might just give up breathing altogether.

Colin rubbed his chest as if to encourage him to take a breath. "Don't look all petrified. I'm not saying we need to go get a marriage license right now. A summer wedding sounds good. I'll have to stick Tim into a tux and make him give me away."

Wes let out the breath he had been holding. "You'll be the death of me," Wes told him.

"If you mean till death do us part, then yes, I will."

Wes could see total commitment in his eyes. He pulled Colin close and ran his hands over him. He needed to feel how real he was. How

could someone so wonderful want to be his forever?

Seeing fear in his eyes, Colin told him, "I'm not looking for a life filled with rainbows and marshmallows. Think of me as your straightjacket."

"Is that supposed to be comforting?"

"Yes," Colin said without hesitation.

And in a way it was. As he held Wes, Colin's eyes took on a solemn cast.

"I'm gonna get sappy now, so get ready," Colin warned him. "You opened your home to me. You opened your arms to me, and you opened your heart to me. You are incredible, and one day I'm going to get you to marry me."

"And you ended with a threat."

"It's a vow. Before you know it, you'll be wearing a ring that shows everyone you're mine." Colin looked so beautiful and fierce as he said that.

"I am yours," Wes told him. No promise could hold him to Colin as strongly as his love.

Hearing the promise in his words, Colin's eyes glowed with happiness. His mouth opened as if he might say something but he only gazed at Wes. The enticing sight of his parted lips made Wes lean down for a kiss. At the first soft touch of his lips, Colin smiled into the kiss. Wrapping his arms around Wes's neck, he pulled him down. Wes wanted to be shackled in those arms. He never wanted to breathe. All he wanted was to endlessly drown in Colin, lose himself in his love forever.

The end

Books by Trina Solet:

And Manny Makes Three

Mark is a struggling college student who has been working as a nanny for a nice family, but they don’t need him any more. Zack has been raising his son, Al, by himself and needs help. Al is a funny kid, and Zack is a funny dad, but more serious issues lurk under the surface. Will Mark be able to deal with these two? And how will Zack and Mark deal with their mutual attraction?

Unexpected Dad

Tyler finds a big surprise waiting on his doorstep. Ready or not, Tyler is a dad. Tyler didn't know he had a daughter until she suddenly dropped into his life. Whether he is ready for her or not, little Julie needs a father. Or maybe two. Tyler and Jake have been best friends, inseparable since college. Now they have to adjust to Tyler's new role as a dad. As Jake helps him cope with being a new father to a little girl, Tyler might be looking at two big changes in his life.

More Than a Manny

A very young, rich widower needs a nanny, but a hot manny would be even better. That's where Nate comes in. Brent is a loving but irresponsible father to two young children from a marriage of convenience. He needs Nate in his life, but how will Nate, a first time nanny, fit into his unconventional household? The kids are a handful, especially little Georgie. Her big brother, Ricky, has a few issues of his own. But Nate is more than ready to take on the challenge and let all three of them steal his heart.

Duncan the Third

Patrick and his little sister, Wendy, have just moved into Duncan's building and that means trouble. Patrick is exactly the kind of guy Duncan can't resist. Together he and his little sister might be the family Duncan has been yearning for but only if he takes a chance and lets them into his heart. Unfortunately, Duncan hasn't been lucky when it comes to relationships. After getting his heart broken too many times, he has sworn off younger men. While Duncan struggles against his attraction to him, Patrick is determined to win him over. As Patrick tries to change his mind, can he also heal Duncan's broken heart?

His True Home

Alec has retreated to his childhood home after a life of too much fun. When a little boy is abandoned on the road leading to Alec's home town of Seaview Pines, Alec is the one who ends up taking care of him. Now Cory is on his way to join them. He was abandoned by his mother as well and wants to give Teddy, his little brother, the family he never had. As they spend time together, it's up to Cory to draw out the serious, silent little boy. He also has to

convince Alec that his home town isn't just a temporary refuge. It's where all three of them belong.

Manny To The Rescue

Why would Owen be terrified of Connie and Maggie, his two adorable little nieces? Because he is about to be left alone with them. Owen thinks he is going to have to take care of his nieces by himself until Dan shows up. If Owen approves, Dan is ready to be the girls' manny. Right from the start, Dan is a big help and an even bigger temptation. And Owen isn't the only one being tempted. When he was younger, Dan had a crush on Owen. Now that he is living with him, Owen has never looked hotter. The crush is back in full force. Too bad Dan isn't the kind of guy Owen is into. But even a hint that he is interested might spur Dan to make a move. Unfortunately, Dan is bringing trouble with him, and he doesn't even know it. When Owen becomes a target, will Dan be there in time to save him?

Poison Heart

Is there anything Vince and Cal won't do for each other? The two of them grew up together and fell deeply in love. They were poor but happy until Cal made a big mistake and ended up in jail. He did it for Vince. To get him out, Vince is willing to do anything. Roland Granger has the power and influence to make Cal a free man. All he wants in return is Vince. Even if Cal never forgives him, Vince is willing to sacrifice himself. Now he has to make sure that Cal accepts this unwanted help. And while Vince is trying to set things right in his own life, can he reunite Roland with a self-destructive young man who loves him?

Make It Better

A favor leads to a life changing experience. Ray is willing to do anything for the man he considers his savior. His mission of mercy is Marcus, a young man who can’t overcome his guilt over a tragedy in his past. Is Ray making a terrible mistake giving his heart to him, or will his love for Marcus be strong enough to bring him back?

My Love Is Real: The Benson Brothers Story

For almost a year Sean and Brian thought they were brothers. Sean wants him more than anything, but will Brian ever accept his love? His pride is only one of the obstacles standing in their way. A dangerous man has a claim on Brian.